

Mary Gifford M.B.

By L.T. Meade



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MARY GIFFORD

Mary Gifford. M.B.



*By L.T. Meade, Author
of "A Princess of the Cutter &c"*



London

Wells Gardner, Darton & Co
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&c.



FOR the medical facts in this book, and for many
of the incidents in connection with medical life,
I am indebted to my old friend and collaborator,
Clifford Halifax, M.D.

L. T. MEADE.

DULWICH, *October 1898.*

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MARY GIFFORD

BACHELOR OF MEDICINE

CHAPTER I

M.B. OF LONDON



THE last three years have meant hard work, but I have lived through it, and am all the better. I have reached a certain summit and may now pause and look around me. From where I stand I can still see the arid plains of the No-God-Land in which it was my lot to live for a time. The dangerous thickets of prejudice and superstition, of ignorance and vice, in which the wild beasts of cruelty and hunger wait to plunder the unwary traveller, still border my horizon. But I, and some others with me, have been lifted now to a certain extent out of the danger. We can pause and thank God.

This narrative is not so much an account of my own life as of the lives of some others, who, dwelling in darkness in the midst of our boasted civilisation, are

day by day, and hour by hour, falling on the roadway, and getting trampled on in the strife. If I have lifted the curtain to let in even one gleam of daylight to lives such as these, I have not been put into the world quite in vain.

My name is Mary Gifford. I come of a good family in the Midland Counties. At the age of eighteen I found myself fairly well educated, and absolutely my own mistress. I had been left by my father and mother the sum of ten thousand pounds. My father had decreed that when I reached eighteen years I was to be of age as far as my money was concerned. He spoke of me as a girl with wisdom and understanding, and did not wish me to be fettered with guardians and trustees. It is true that I could not touch the capital, but the interest I was to have absolute control over.

I mourned very deeply for my father, for I loved him well; but I determined, all the same, not to spoil my life. At eighteen I had passed through an excellent High School, and a few months after the death of my last parent, Jane Gillespie came to see me. She was my father's first cousin. I had known her all my life, and I was glad to welcome her now. She urged me to come and live in her house, and to enter Society. In reply to her appeal, which was given with great earnestness and a real desire for my well-being, I told her that I had made up my mind to study medicine, and to be in process of time a doctor. Jane was horrified; she belonged to the old, somewhat narrow school. I felt strong enough to resist her entreaties that I would not immolate myself on what she deemed an unwomanly altar. Had I not talked this project over with my

father, and had he not given it his sanction? He and I had more or less planned what my career should be during the first years which followed his death. Shortly afterwards, therefore, I made up my mind to follow the very excellent education which I had received at the High School in North London by a thorough medical training. This would occupy at least five years, but I had health, plenty of means, and a good general education to fall back upon. I did not intend to fail at any of my examinations, and meant to study hard and to throw myself into the fascinating work with all the power and enthusiasm of which I was capable.

This story has very little to do with my life at the London School of Medicine for Women, and what I learned at the Royal Free Hospital in the Gray's Inn Road (the only hospital in London where women can take a complete course of clinical instruction) cannot be mentioned here. Suffice it to say, that shortly after my twenty-third birthday I passed my final M.B. examination, and found myself with a first-class degree in medicine.

I shall never forget the bright spring day when I walked to Burlington House with Laura Barrington, my favourite friend and companion, to look at the lists.

"Laura," I cried excitedly, "is it failure, or is it success?"

"You know perfectly well, Molly, that you have not only passed, but taken honours," replied Laura, giving me an affectionate glance.

"I did feel certain on the point last night," I answered, "but just now I am oppressed by terrible nervousness. Oh, here we are; what a crowd, and I know most of

those girls! I don't want them to see me if I have failed. Look for me, Laura, will you not? I will stand just behind here."

"I will look with pleasure," replied Laura; "but as to your having failed, that is mere nonsense."

She mounted the steps, and I stood and waited at the bottom. Some of the men students were standing near me. I noticed that several of them looked pale, and that their eyes were anxious. One young fellow, a foot or two away, was holding a telegraph form in his hand. The moment the news reached him he meant to fill in the form and send the message of joyful success—oh, I felt certain it must be success—to the friends he loved best. I had no very near friends, and therefore, whether I succeeded or not, a telegram would be unnecessary. The thought depressed me. Before I could give it careful consideration, however, Laura came flying down the steps.

"Molly! Molly!" she said, with a sort of gasp, "you have done it; your name is bracketed with another. You have not only passed, but you have taken a first-class."

Now I had earnestly hoped to take a second-class, but a first was beyond my wildest dreams. I staggered, and felt that I was turning pale.

"I am bracketed with another," I said, after a pause. "A man or a woman?"

As I said the latter words a tall medical student, who was standing near, turned and glanced at me. He must have been nearly thirty years of age. His face was thin, his eyes deeply set, and grey; his lips were firm, and also somewhat stern in outline; he

had a cleft in his chin. He was much older than the ordinary medical student, and I noticed that his coat was a little threadbare, and his shirt cuffs frayed.

"You are bracketed with a *man*, think of the honour!" said Laura, in a tone half-proud, half-mocking, "but I could not catch his name. There is such a crowd round the lists that I can scarcely get back again. What is to be done?"

"I will not leave here until I know the name of that man," I replied. "I may never see him in my life, but I am determined to know who is my companion in my hour of triumph."

"Perhaps I can help you," said the tall stranger, bending towards me as he spoke.

"Oh, will you?" I said eagerly; "it would be most kind."

"May I ask your name?"

"Mary Gifford."

He gave me a quick glance, and bounded up the steps. In a moment he came down again. I noticed a change in his face; it was just as if a shadow had been lifted; but he was very quiet, and his voice restrained.

"The name of your companion in honours," he said, "is John Erle. Can I get you any further information?"

"Yes, one thing more," I exclaimed. "Mr. John Erle is probably here; I should like to see him."

A flashing smile came and went on the medical student's face.

"For what he is worth I can introduce him," he said. He took off his hat and bowed.

"What!" I cried; "is it possible? Are you John Erle, really John Erle?"

"That is my name."

"Will you shake hands with me?" I said.

He held out his very thin hand, grasped mine firmly, took off his hat, and the next moment disappeared in the crowd.

"Now you are happy, Molly," said Laura. "I have not begun to congratulate you yet, but I do now with all my heart. Molly, what does it feel like to succeed?"

"It gives you a dazed sensation," I answered. "Let me repeat the wonderful news to myself. 'I, Mary Gifford, have taken a first-class in honours, and I have been bracketed with John Erle.' By the way, Laura, what did you think of John Erle?"

"I thought him very thin and very poor, and I am sure he has worked too hard," replied Laura. "You are never likely to meet him again; he goes one way in life, you another. Now come home as fast as you can."

"I should so like to send a telegram," I said. "All the other medical students who have passed are sending telegrams to their friends." I paused, and then my face brightened. "Yes," I said, "I will send a wire to Rose West. Don't you remember Rose? She had to go home a year ago; she broke down. Don't you recall how bitterly she cried when she came to say good-bye. She always prophesied that I should have great success. I will wire to her; let us go to the telegraph office at once."

"But would not a letter do?"

"No; a wire will be best, more befitting the occasion.

Can't you understand, Laura, that I am dying to send a wire to somebody?"

Laura said nothing more. We hurried to the telegraph office, and the message was sent off to Rose in her quiet home.

"You will give up this flat now," said Laura, when we once more entered our snug little rooms in Bloomsbury.

"Presently," I answered. "I am in no great hurry. Oh, by the way, I must go and see Jane Gillespie."

"That old cousin of yours; but why now?"

"Because I am restless. I want some one else to congratulate me. Jane shall be proud of me to-day. She never wished me to become a doctor, it is true, but this great honour must alter matters."

Laura said nothing more, and half-an-hour afterwards I had hailed a hansom, and told the man to drive me to Onslow Square.

I arrived at the house between four and five in the afternoon, and the trim parlour-maid whom I had known for years admitted me.

"This is my mistress's 'At-Home' day, Miss Molly," she said, "and there are several visitors in the drawing-room; but she will be delighted to see you, of course."

I ran quickly upstairs, and Susan flung open the door of Jane's great drawing-room and announced my name. I went eagerly forward. There were about fifteen ladies in the room, and two or three men. They all turned and looked at me when I was announced. Miss Gillespie did not often have such young visitors. She started up when she saw me, the colour entered her face, she came forward and extended her hands.

"How are you, Mary?" she said. "Sit down, dear,

won't you? Let me introduce my friend Mr. Ferguson. Mr. Ferguson, this is my young cousin, Mary Gifford. Mary, help yourself to tea, dear; you will find it on that side table."

Miss Gillespie resumed her seat, and continued her conversation with the stout, red-faced lady who was seated near her on the sofa.

"He is quite the most evangelical man I ever listened to," she began. "Yes, he preaches the pure Gospel. It is a rare treat in these days of ungodliness to listen to him. I have made up my mind to take sittings in his church."

I turned away and devoted myself to Mr. Ferguson. He was a prosy old man, and looked upon girls as ignorant, bright young creatures, fond of flowers and dress. He spoke to me about spring flowers for nearly five minutes, then he turned his attention to dress. He asked me what shops I patronised, and if I took as much pleasure as most girls in staring into shop windows. Finally he advised me to do my own dress-making. He said that his daughters did so, and found it an immense saving. I congratulated him quite heartily about his daughters, and carefully concealed the fact that I was myself a full-blown doctor, and could dissect him from his skull to his toes without the slightest difficulty.

After a time the guests began to go.

Just as the last lady visitor was leaving the room the door was opened and Susan announced another visitor. A tall, stout, elderly gentleman came in. He had a very benevolent face, with grey hair, which fell back from his broad forehead.

"My dear Dr. Follett," said Jane. She came forward with enthusiasm, holding out both her hands to welcome the visitor.

"I can only spare two or three minutes," he said. "I knew you had your 'At-Home' to-day, and I thought I would look you up."

"I am very glad you have come," she said. "Sit down, please. Let me introduce you to my dear young cousin; Mary Gifford—Dr. Andrew Follett."

I knew the name; I could not help knowing it. Dr. Andrew Follett was one of the best-known nerve specialists in Harley Street.

"Jane," I said suddenly, blushing as I spoke, and then turning pale, "I came here, not to interrupt you in the midst of your visitors, but to tell you something. I have just learned that I have passed my M.B. examination with success."

Dr. Follett turned and gazed at me; the expression on his face was half quizzical, half disapproving, but I noticed a kindly gleam in his eyes.

"Am I really speaking to one of those new monsters of Society, a lady doctor?" he inquired.

"Yes," I replied with spirit, "and at the present moment I feel remarkably proud of myself. My long course of training is at an end; I am an M.B. of London, and have also taken a first-class."

"Then you are a clever young woman; and do you know, I rather dislike clever young women," answered Dr. Follett. "But sit near me, child, and let us have a talk. So you, a mere girl, have had the audacity to encroach on my preserves?"

"They are not your preserves any more than they

are mine," I replied. "Yes, I am a doctor, your brother in the same profession."

"Upon my word! you have cheek. You are not my brother but my sister, and a fine specimen of the sex. But now, my dear young lady, you must listen to a home truth from an old man. I always say what I think—I strongly disapprove of lady doctors."

"How narrow and old-fashioned of you," I answered.

He raised his brows and indulged in a hearty laugh.

"Jane," he said, looking at Miss Gillespie, "this child is as frank as I am myself; it is positively refreshing. If you happen to have a cup of tea by you, not stone cold, I will have it, please, and also some cake. Dr. Mary Gifford, will you wait upon the old physician—quite old enough to be your father, by the way."

"I shall be delighted to serve you," I said, jumping up. "Sit still, Jane, please."

I brought Dr. Follett his tea, and a little table to hold his cup and saucer, and then sat down on a low chair near him.

"It is a great pleasure to me to meet you," I said, "and now I intend to return good for evil. You have been rather rude to me, but I shall be polite to you. I have attended many of your lectures; you have been an inspiration to me for the last five years."

"Good, good," said Dr. Follett; "how very prettily our young doctor speaks"—he glanced at Jane, and smiled again.

"All the same, child," he continued, "I could have welcomed you, and given you good work, had you taken up the noble profession of nursing; but a doctor,

pah! Do you think those slight fingers, those little hands, are meant to perform endless operations? No, no, Nature is outraged; Nature never intended anything of the sort. You go too far, Dr. Mary Gifford; but all the same, if I can at any time in any way help you, you have but to command me."

He rose as he spoke.

"Good-bye, Jane," he said. "I am pleased to have met your young cousin. I admire her as a woman, but I detest her as a doctor. Now let me give you a further word of advice, Miss Gifford. Don't affix 'Doctor' to your name; show your intelligent, bright face in Society, pick up a good husband, and——"

"Oh, pray don't say any more," I interrupted. "I was so pleased with you, and your brusqueness and rudeness did not affect me at all, but now you are falling from your pedestal."

"Then I dare not add another word. I see obstinacy in that chin. Good-bye, Jane; good-bye, doctor."

He nodded to us both, and left the room.

"How glad I am to have met him," I said.

"But he is displeased with you, Molly," said Miss Gillespie. "Dear me, child, what a rash, bold, daring creature you are!"



CHAPTER II

DR. FOLLETT



JANE seated herself on the sofa, I placed myself near her. She put on her *pince-nez* and examined me from the crown of my head to my neatly-shod feet.

"H'm!" she said, after a pause; "so you have really done it. Well, I must say your dress does you credit. There is nothing the least extravagant or *outré* about it. I don't say that on my 'At-Home' afternoons a hat a little less plain would not have been more suitable."

"I did not know it was your 'At-Home' afternoon," I interrupted. "The fact is, I was very much excited, and felt I must come to you; I did want your sympathy so very badly. But I have a smart hat at home; it is mostly composed of roses and mignonette."

"Yes, dear, yes; and of course I sympathise with you in any moment of triumph. But this—this goes against the grain. I agree with dear old Dr. Follett. You know——"

"Oh, do leave Dr. Follett out of the discussion for the present," I said. "I am glad at least, Jane, that you are satisfied with my dress."

"By the way, Mary," continued my relative, "do you happen to know that you are quite a good-looking girl?"

I did not smile; I did know perfectly well that I was good-looking, not exactly beautiful, but very pleasant to look upon. Scores of times my fellow-medical students had acquainted me with this fact.

"Yes," pursued Miss Gillespie, "you resemble your dear father, one of the handsomest men I ever met. Your eyes are like his, dark and intelligent, your features are fairly well formed, and that abundance of black hair, which I must say you arrange very tastefully, has a striking effect. But now to the main fact. So you are really a doctor?"

"I am."

"Let me try to realise it. For instance, if I were ill, feverish, out of sorts, you could——"

"I could diagnose your case," I interrupted.

"Oh, don't, I beg of you, Mary, torture me with those technical phrases; they sound from a girl's lips so terribly unladylike. Well, dear, I will try and realise the main fact. Have you ever—Mary, I scarcely like to ask the question—have you ever cut people up in the dissecting room?"

"Of course I have," I replied; "but you had better not ask me anything more about my medical training."

"How you have lived through those dreadful years——"

"Delightful years, you mean."

"We must agree to differ. Mary, I sometimes think that the modern woman is a little off her head—*exalté*, you know, that is the term. She does not see herself as men see her."

"Of course not, she would not wish to."

"You will change your mind one day. I do trust that dear Dr. Follett's wish with regard to you will come true, and that you will find a good husband."

"Some day I may," I answered quietly, "but at present I have no intention of marrying. I am a doctor; I mean to practise in my profession."

"Dear child, like many of the rest of your sex, you are a little mad. Your father was eccentric, and you take after him. Now, with your income, Mary—ten thousand pounds I know is your capital—you could have been thoroughly comfortable as an inmate of my house, and by this time, with your rather striking appearance, you would have met some eligible——"

"Don't, Jane."

I stood up and began to draw on my gloves.

"Sit down again, dear; you are not going to leave me so quickly. Of course, now that you have passed your final examination you won't stay any longer in Bloomsbury?"

"I can't quite say at present."

"Come and be my guest for a fortnight. I will take you into Society; you are very queer and quaint, and I should not be a bit surprised if you made a hit. Do come to me, Mary, for your father's sake."

I saw a look in Jane Gillespie's face which suddenly opened my eyes. Was it possible that she had cared for my father, and was it on account of him that she had remained unmarried? For the first time in all my life she appeared to me as a woman with whom I could have sympathy.

"Very well," I replied, after a pause. "My special

friend Laura goes into the country to-morrow, so I will come to you on Saturday, if you like."

"That is a good child; it will really be a novel experience to take you out. By the way, of course you won't call yourself Dr. Gifford?"

"I certainly shall when I begin to practise; at present it does not matter. After I have spent a week or so with you I mean to go into the country for the summer, for I want a good long rest. I shall not begin my medical work seriously before the autumn."

I bent towards Jane as I spoke and kissed her, then I tripped downstairs and out of the house.

The evening was a fine one. I determined to walk back to Bloomsbury. I was a good walker, and presently found myself in Hyde Park. I went along slowly, pondering over my future. Suddenly I heard a voice calling my name, and looking round, I observed that a brougham had drawn up by the pathway. Dr. Follett's head, with its white hair, was thrust out of the window, and he was beckoning me to his side.

"Where are you going?" he said. "May I see you home?"

"I am returning to Fowler Street," I answered.

"Quite on my way," he replied. "Do give an old man the privilege of taking you to your destination." He stepped out, opening the door of the carriage as he spoke. I could not refuse. I entered his brougham. We were soon bowling away together.

"I hope, Miss Gifford," he said, after a pause, "you didn't think me rude this afternoon?"

"Not at all," I answered; "you were frank, of course, but that you had a right to be."

"I believe I was also rude; I often am when I am irritated; some women irritate me terribly. Now I wish to say to you that you have done a very brave thing. I don't approve of it, of course, but that does not alter the bravery of the action. Did I hear my ears aright when you told me that you had taken a first-class in medicine?"

"It is quite true," I replied; "my name was on the lists outside Burlington House this afternoon. I was bracketed with a man of the name of John Erle," I continued, after a pause.

"Erle! Erle!" exclaimed the old doctor; "John Erle! God bless my soul! John Erle, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Was he there?"

"Yes; I shook hands with him."

"What sort of man, Miss Gifford?"

"Tall, thin, rather old for a medical student," I replied. "He had a sad face; he seemed to be the sort of man who has known trouble."

"If he is the John Erle I allude to, he has known enough to crush the life out of twenty ordinary men. And so he has entered the profession! You don't happen by any chance to know his address?"

"I don't."

The old doctor sighed and sank back against the comfortable cushions of his carriage.

"I should like to meet him," he said. "Well, and you were bracketed with him. Now tell me what you mean to do with yourself. I presume, as you have gone through these stiff exams., and have been crowned with glory, that you will not hide your talent in a napkin?"

"Certainly not; I mean to work hard."

"And to make money, eh?"

"Of course."

"That's good. I much prefer girls who are sensible, and tell me quite frankly that they intend to go in for the loaves and fishes."

"I must make money in order to live comfortably," I replied. "I have a small amount of my own, but I have not the slightest intention of giving my services for nothing."

"Good again. You might be appointed to a hospital, not a big one—Heaven forbid!—but a small one in one of the suburbs, for a year or so. Of course you quite understand that you would only receive your board and lodging, but you would gain immense practice, and—well, we can talk of this later on. You will have a good rest first?"

"Yes," I replied; "I am going to the country for the summer."

"That is excellent. Here we are in Fowler Street. Good-bye, Miss Gifford. I know your cousin very well—we have been friends for nearly twenty years. For her sake I am willing to do what I can for you. Once more, let me congratulate you."

"Thank you from my heart," I replied. "Now I am going to confess the truth to you, Dr. Follett," I continued. "I was piqued when you did not say a word of commendation to-day."

A smile rose from his lips to his eyes and made his whole face charming.

"You have forgiven me, and that is all right," he said. "Yes, I admire you, and think you have done a brave

thing; but all the same, I cling to my own opinion. I do not like girls to become doctors. I hate to think of a woman going through a school of medicine. I hate to feel that those delicate hands have—faugh!—don't let us talk of it any more. The curious thing is, that I don't believe—yes, I must confess it—I don't believe, bad as in some ways the training is, that it has injured you.”

“Injured me!” I replied. “The education I have received has strengthened my nerves and rendered my head clear and cool. I have no time for the small nerve-aches which are the curse of so many women. Now, Dr. Follett, you cannot frankly say—you who are a nerve specialist—that you prefer women who are nervous and hysterical?”

“I hate them!” said the doctor suddenly. Then he drew up and pursed in his lips. “You must not repeat that, Dr. Gifford,” he said, holding out his hand to me; “if you did, you would ruin the poor old specialist. Good-bye, good-bye. I believe you can find your work as a valuable physician to women and children.”

“Don't go away with a false impression,” I retorted; “I have no intention of circumscribing my work. If men require my services, I shall also attend them. As a doctor, I stand quite apart from the question of sex. Some day, perhaps, I shall have my special line, and be able——” Then I stopped abruptly and coloured, for I found in the slow amusement which was dawning in Dr. Follett's eyes, that I was entertaining him considerably. He handed me out of the carriage, and I stood on the steps of the tall house on the fifth storey of which I lived, and watched him out of sight.



CHAPTER III

THE MAN WITH AFFECTIONATE DOMESTIC TENDENCIES



ON the following Saturday I went to stay with Jane Gillespie. Laura had gone into the country two days before. I had given up my rooms in Fowler Street, and had packed my furniture and sent it off to a warehouse to be kept until I required it. I had also bought some smart dresses, for I had no idea of presenting a shabby appearance to Jane's fashionable world, and finally I arrived at her house an hour before dinner.

Some friends were coming to dine, and we were all going afterwards to the Lyceum. I had only time therefore to run up to my room and prepare for the festive evening which lay before me. I dressed myself suitably in a rich and yet girlish-looking frock of white Bengaline. I clasped a single row of pearls round my throat and ran downstairs, feeling light at heart and much inclined to whistle. I used to whistle a good deal in Fowler Street, but I suddenly remembered that this would be considered an unladylike accomplishment in Onslow Square.

I entered the drawing-room, where several of Jane's friends were already assembled. She introduced me to some of my neighbours, and I was taken down to dinner by an intelligent, elderly gentleman, who avoided the subject of medicine as he would poison, and talked to me on other matters. My companion was not specially up to date, and I could have crushed several of his arguments had I willed; but I am ordinarily good-natured, and did not wish to make him uncomfortable. So I laid myself out to please him, and I soon saw that he was regarding me with complaisance.

"I am glad you have come to stay with Miss Gillespie," he said, as I was dipping my strawberries into cream. "She is a most sensible woman, and an old friend of mine. You will forgive me, young lady, if I say that I have heard some particulars with regard to your extraordinary career. Oh, I by no means wish to enter into a discussion on the subject, but I do hope you will make up your mind to stay with your cousin."

"Has she told you that she is willing to receive me?" I asked.

"Not exactly, but I gather that she would be glad of such an arrangement. Believe me, it would be a sensible thing for you, a young girl, alone in this modern Babylon——"

"Are you aware," I interrupted a little brusquely, "that this young girl, and, by the way, I am twenty-three, has been in the modern Babylon, living alone, absolutely alone, her own mistress, for the last five years. Are you further aware, that during that time she has gone through a severe course of medical training, that

she has walked the hospitals, and lived in the dissecting rooms, and——”

I perceived a shudder creeping through my companion's frame.

“Yes, yes,” he said, “I know, I know, and I am not prepared to argue with you.” Then he adroitly turned the conversation, and by the time we had well reached the commonplace, the signal came for the ladies to leave the room. A few minutes later we were all on our way to the theatre. The play was an excellent one, and Irving was at his best. I enjoyed myself vastly, and forgot all about my narrow-minded neighbour at the dinner-table.

The next day, Sunday, Dr. Follett came to dine. On this occasion he did not single me out for any special attention, and he left before tea. When he did so, Jane turned to me with a sigh.

“It is a pity he is so eccentric,” she said.

“Most clever people seem to be eccentric,” I answered.

“What a very conceited remark to make, Mary, for I suppose you consider yourself clever,” replied Jane.

“Not specially,” I answered. “But how is Dr. Follett different from any other great physician?”

“He has never married, and he leads almost the life of a hermit. He is one of the richest doctors in London, and gives, I understand, a great deal to the poor. He will never speak of what he does with his money, although I have often tried to draw him out. He is a modest man, and a good fellow, one of the best I know. I am inclined to think that if you need his advice presently in the intricacies of the very terrible career you have adopted, he will be glad to give it to you.”

"I shall certainly ask him to help me if ever I need his help," I answered somewhat proudly; "but, Jane, I would prefer to struggle into eminence alone and unaided."

"To struggle into eminence, poor child," said Jane in a sad voice, shaking her head at me. "My dear girl, it would take a couple of centuries to accustom the public to a woman doctor."

"I don't think so, Jane. The world is going to receive the woman doctor by leaps and bounds. Believe me, in five years from now I shall have a larger practice than I can well manage alone."

"By the way," she said, after a pause, "Dr. Follett is quite determined to follow up the fortunes of your fellow-student in honours. He spoke to me with a great deal of interest about John Erle. It appears that Mr. Erle's father was Dr. Follett's greatest friend when they were both young."

"I hope Dr. Follett will find John Erle," I answered eagerly. "From the brief glance I had of him, he seemed to be a very clever man, and also one of the most determined I have ever come across. I am certain of one thing—from his appearance he must be desperately poor."

"Really, my dear, you have found out a great deal about him during the few moments you were in his company," replied Jane. She glanced at my face, then looked away again.

"Be sure Dr. Follett will help him if he needs help," she continued.

The conversation then drifted into ordinary matters. Jane was most anxious for my welfare, and determined

that I should have a good time while in her house. I did enjoy a very happy fortnight while with her. I entered Society, and did my best to make myself agreeable. I found myself the centre of attraction, and several of those delicate compliments which are consistent with nineteenth-century society reached my ears.

The fortnight flew on the wings of time, and I left Jane to go into the country. Laura and I had agreed to spend the summer months in a farmhouse not far from Dartmoor. She had already taken rooms, and I joined her on a sunny afternoon towards the middle of June. I took with me a modest and sensible wardrobe and a purse of thirty pounds, which I made up my mind should see me through my summer holidays.

Laura and I had a good time in the country. We economised, and found it delightful; we talked a great deal over our future prospects; we threshed the woman question bare; we exhausted the subject of university training; we condemned the frivols of our sex; we clearly marked out the line in life which we would each adhere to; we swore eternal friendship, and determined not to marry until our first youth was over.

Towards the end of October I found myself back again in London. Jane had asked me to make her house my home until I had determined on my future course, and I eagerly accepted her invitation.

She received me kindly, even affectionately; she had been going through a course of the waters at Homburg, and was consequently in good health and in the best of spirits.

In the course of the evening Jane asked me about my future prospects.

"To begin, what is your income?" she asked. "What does your ten thousand pounds capital produce?"

"My income amounts to three hundred a year," I answered.

"Three per cent.," said Jane; "that is very fair—and I know your lawyer, Mr. Hinde. No girl could have her money in safer hands. Well now, Mary, I want to make a proposal. Will you live with me during this winter. I don't mean to charge you anything. You can save your money and do me an infinite service."

"You are more than kind," I replied slowly, "but I must start work immediately."

"As a doctor?"

"As a doctor," I answered.

"Do you intend to work in London?"

"If possible in London, dear Jane."

"But how will you get the work, my child? You cannot walk about with a label on your back declaring that you are Dr. Mary Gifford—the mere name makes me shudder."

"I shall take the usual course," I answered.

"That is, you will rent a house and have a brass plate on your door?"

"No, I have no present intention of doing anything so foolish. I think of buying a practice."

"Buying a practice? But you can only do so by spending some of your capital, and I thought it was all tied up?"

"It is tied up for ordinary purposes, but my father made a clause in his will providing for a contingency like the present. I can spend two thousand out of the ten in buying a good practice. Of course in such an

important matter I cannot be in a hurry, and must be very careful how I act, but I shall begin to advertise to-morrow."

"You had better go to Mr. Hinde, Mary, and take his advice."

But I shook my head at that suggestion.

Early the next week advertisements which I most carefully compiled appeared in the different medical papers. They were, in the first instance, all addressed to lady doctors.

"A lady M.B. of London, who has taken honours, wishes to enter into partnership with another lady similarly qualified, in a West End practice."

My advertisement appeared about a dozen times, and I received something like a dozen answers. Each of these I attended to, going carefully into the matter. I had many interviews with the lady doctors who wished to secure my services and also my money, and I must say, without wishing to run them down in any way, that they were much more keen about the two thousand pounds I was prepared to offer, than about the fact that I had made a special study of the localisation of functions of the cerebral centres, or was thoroughly *au fait* with the cultivation of bacilli.

In short, I finally decided not to join forces with any of these leading lights in the medical world, but to wait and reserve my services.

Time went on, however, and I began to get more and more tired of doing nothing. When this state of things had continued for a month, and the winter was nearly at its worst, I once more advertised in the medical journals.

"A young lady M.B. of London, who has taken honours, wishes to enter into partnership with a medical man similarly qualified, who has already secured a good practice. It is essential that the practice should be in London."

Having taken this daring step I waited results with some trepidation. I had consulted Jane about my former advertisement, but I told her nothing with regard to this one. I had, I think, in all three replies to it. Two I put into the fire without even taking the trouble to reply to them; the third I hesitated over, and finally decided to follow it up. It was from a doctor who signed himself "Walter Sturgess"; his practice was in a rather crowded part of St. Pancras, but that fact impressed me favourably. I was so sick of being idle that I wanted to throw myself into the fray, to take my part in the thickest of the fight. In St. Pancras I should have poor as well as rich patients. If the practice turned out a good investment for my money, I should in all probability close with Dr. Sturgess. His letter was very short and to the point; he was evidently not shocked at my suggestion of a partnership with a medical man. I appointed therefore to meet him at my club, the "Onward."

It was on a certain afternoon towards the end of November that I went to the Onward Club to interview my proposed partner. I awaited his arrival with some impatience. Had I nearly reached my bourne at last? Was he generous enough, and high-minded enough, and advanced enough, to permit a woman, a cultivated and clever woman, to take equal part with him in his practice?

After a quarter of an hour's waiting in the small private room which I had engaged for the occasion, a thin, nervous-looking man, anæmic in face, and with a want of fibre all over his person, was admitted into the room. My heart sank the moment I caught sight of him. I stood up, however, and bowed. He bowed in reply.

"I presume I am addressing Miss Gifford?" he said.

"Dr. Gifford," I replied.

"Ah, yes," he continued; "it is really astonishing how ladies are pushing themselves into the profession."

He had now seated himself on the edge of the nearest chair. His eyes were lowered, and I noticed that a considerably accession of colour had come into his thin cheeks.

"It occurred to me, Miss Gifford—I beg your pardon, Dr. Gifford—that an interview would be the best way out of the difficulty."

"What difficulty?" I asked in astonishment.

He paused again, then looking me full in the face, continued—

"Your advertisement—was—it struck me abundantly plain in its meaning."

"It certainly was," I answered; "I want a good practice. If you and I can arrange terms——"

He pulled his chair a little closer.

"Let us come to business," he said; "my practice is an excellent one, I earn eight hundred a year. I may also say that I am popular with my patients."

"At St. Pancras you have doubtless a mixed practice of wealthy and poor," I interrupted.

"Of course there are poor connected with the practice," he replied somewhat impatiently, "but I have

long ago handed them over to my partner. My partner's name is Fairleigh; he is a worthy young man."

"But, forgive me," I said, "I gathered from your answer that you wished for a partner, not that you already had one."

This very innocent remark seemed to disturb Dr. Sturgess considerably. He half jumped up from his seat, and then seated himself again; then once more he darted an inquiring glance into my face.

"You could not expect me to look after a number of people unaided," he said at last in an injured voice; "a firm of doctors is quite the fashion, and, believe me, works better than one man single-handed."

"Yes, but I have no intention of joining a firm," I replied; "I prefer a partnership of two."

"A partnership of two," he repeated, and he rubbed his hands almost gleefully.

"I wish to work; I am very anxious to begin work," I continued, "consequently I put the advertisement, which you happened to see, into the *Lancet*."

"Ah, yes," he replied, "that is a roundabout and ingenious way of coming to the gist of the matter. I quite understand."

I failed to see that he did, more particularly when he went on to remark—

"Do you seriously mean to tell me that you have passed the London M.B. and taken honours? I shan't tell any one of course, but is it true?"

"I did take honours in medicine," I replied; "is it impossible for you to believe that a woman has as good brains as a clever man?"

"But my business here to-day is not to test your brains."

"Perhaps you will tell me, then, why you have come to see me," I answered.

He coloured again, and I now for the first time noticed that he was terribly nervous.

"Let me state exactly what I require," I said, trying with all my might to keep in my rising impatience. "I want to buy a share in a good practice."

"You cannot seriously contemplate a *medical* partnership?" interrupted Dr. Sturgess.

"Certainly I do," I replied; "what other kind of partnership can you be dreaming of?"

Then I looked into his face and he looked into mine, and all in a moment I knew what he meant. Good heavens! the man had come to see me under the impression that I might be induced to marry him. I started up, he also rose to his feet.

"I beg your pardon most sincerely," he said; "I had hoped, when I saw your advertisement, and even more so when I read your letter, that the opportunity for which I have long been looking had arrived. The fact is, I am anxious to meet an intelligent woman with a little—yes, quite a little amount of capital would be sufficient—who would be willing to be my companion, my helpmeet. Miss Gifford, I am a lonely man; my practice is a good one, and it is likely to increase. With further capital I might even purchase a share in a still more lucrative partnership. I am not forty yet; I am younger than I look."

"Permit me to say that you have completely misunderstood me, and that there is an end of our interview," I said haughtily.

My tone crushed him, he turned white. Presently he held out a limp hand, which I refused to see.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I am very sorry; it was stupid of me."

He went out, trembling as he did so. When he reached the door he turned and looked at me.

"The advanced young woman of the present day is quite beyond my comprehension," he said slowly, then he closed the door abruptly after him.

When his steps were well out of hearing, I sat down on the nearest seat and burst out laughing. I believe I laughed from sheer nervousness. The secretary of the club happened to hear me, and came in.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said, "I fancied there were people in the room; I did not know you were by yourself."

"It does not matter," I replied.

"But I have interrupted you?"

"Not at all."

"Surely I heard you laugh; you must have been laughing with some one."

"I was; I was laughing with myself," I replied; "is that very odd and strange?"

"Nothing that a woman does now is strange," she answered, and she also shut the door and went away.

"This won't do," I said to myself. "I don't wish to get the character of being eccentric."

I hurried back to Jane.

"Good-bye to any chance of a partnership," I reflected, as I drove home in a hansom. "I see I must start practice on my own account; or stay, before I do anything further shall I go and see Dr. Follett.

He promised to help me when I needed help. Nothing would be more invaluable at the present moment than his advice. I will go and see him to-morrow morning."

At tea that day Jane noticed my flushed face. She must have guessed that something had happened, but I took care not to enlighten her.

By the early post on the following morning I received a letter from Dr. Sturgess. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR MADAM,—Pray forgive what must have looked like want of civility and intuition yesterday. I don't think I could stand the ridicule which would assail me if I were to make you my partner in the medical sense of the word. But it is quite true that you have won my entire respect; nay, more, my sincere admiration. Having secured my esteem, my regard will quickly follow, and, I doubt not, in process of time, my ardent affection. For some years I have been anxiously looking for a helpmeet worthy of me, and from what I saw of you yesterday, I am sure that you would suit me admirably. My practice, already good, is capable of enlargement, and I can offer you a plain, but most comfortable home. I also should not object, at least at first, to your assisting me a little. You might, for instance, take the dispensing—in a practice like mine a large department—and I could then afford to do without the medical assistant who now attends to this branch of my work. But of course, as my wife, domestic matters would have to come before all else. You would make a charming mistress of my house, for you have style, and, let me add, beauty. I do not make the least doubt that

we should get on most comfortably. If you will give your serious attention to this weighty matter, I shall be pleased to see you again, and am also willing to be interviewed by your friends, in order that they may ascertain for themselves how excellent the position I am prepared to offer you is. Do not, I beg of you, cast away this proposal without giving it your most careful attention. Believe me, as a young unmarried lady you are exposing yourself to all kinds of unnecessary and unpleasant rebuffs. As my wife you would be protected from such; and I should not mind discussing with you the newest treatment of those diseases which it is fit and proper to talk over with a person of the opposite sex. To guard you against what is coarse and unpleasant would be my constant aim. Let me add that I am a man of affectionate, domestic tendencies, and I believe I can make you thoroughly happy.—Your sincere admirer,

“WALTER STURGESS.”

This letter did not cause a fit of laughter; on the contrary, it produced a fit of trembling. I looked up from its perusal, and caught Jane's eyes fixed on my face.

“What is wrong, dear?” she said. “Is anything seriously troubling you?”

“I have received my first proposal,” I replied, “and am carefully considering it.”

“My dear Mary, no wonder you look anxious. Oh, my child, how relieved I should be!”

“What would relieve you?” I asked.

“If you were to marry, darling; if you were to

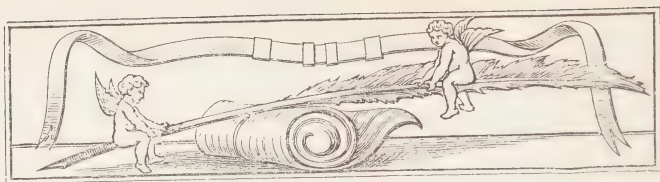
give up this terrible, fearful profession, and enter the domestic line, so much more suitable for a woman. Believe me, dear, it is the position which Providence intends for you."

"Now, how can you tell that, Jane?" I replied. "If Providence had not wished me to be a doctor, should I have had leading ideas on the subject? Should I have been given ample means to pursue my medical education? Should I have passed my examinations, not only with credit, but with honour? No, dear Jane, you are a little old-fashioned, although you are the sweetest woman in the world, and you cannot see things from my point of view. This is my answer to my first proposal of marriage."

As I spoke I walked deliberately to the fire and dropped the letter into its depths.

"Dearest child, don't tell me that your heart is set against matrimony. Oh, that poor, poor fellow, who has given you his heart, and you treat him——"

"No, Jane, he has not given me his heart. I never met the poor fellow in question until yesterday. Believe me, this is a purely commercial transaction on his part. It is true that I am rejecting the hand of a man with affectionate domestic tendencies, but even at the risk of making a great mistake I can have nothing more to do with him. Do not let us say anything further on the subject, Jane. But this has been the very last straw. I am going immediately to see Dr. Follett."



CHAPTER IV

100 QUEEN ANNE STREET



DR. FOLLETT'S hours for seeing patients were from ten to one. I must not intrude upon him during the valuable moments when he was doubtless coining guineas, and also relieving the woes of a very hysterical portion of the community. I resolved, therefore, to arrive at his house at half-past nine. I did not make an appointment beforehand, I trusted to chance. The day on which I went might or might not be his hospital day, he might or might not be at home. If he were away I would leave my card, and trust to his looking me up; if he were at home, hey presto! I might obtain my heart's desire.

As I drove to the great doctor's house I determined not to make nerves my speciality. I was too practical and keen to stand the affected ways of the hysterical and nervous. Like many another girl in the full flush of health and youth, I despised what I could not possibly understand.

Dr. Follett's house was in Grosvenor Street, a solid-looking mansion, with window-boxes full of flowering winter shrubs, carefully kept steps, and polished door

handles. I pressed the electric bell, and a footman with a solemn face, and in correct livery, flung open the door immediately.

"Is Dr. Follett within?" I asked.

The man replied that he was, but that he did not receive patients before ten o'clock.

I glanced at a little timepiece in the hall, and I saw that it pointed to the half-hour.

"I have not come as a patient," I said boldly. "Will you give Dr. Follett this card?" I handed it to the man; its inscription was "Miss Mary Gifford, M.B., London."

He glanced at it, asked me to step inside, and went away. In a very short time he returned.

"The doctor will see you, madam," he said; "come this way."

He took me down the hall, threw open a door and admitted me. I passed round the other side of a screen, and the next moment my hand was taken in a cordial clasp by Dr. Follett himself.

"Well, my sister in the profession, and what can I do for you?" he cried. "Sit down; here is the chair where my patients usually sit. I know you are not a patient, but never mind. Tell me about yourself. Have you begun work? how does the thing pay? Has the world already crowded to the great new medical light?"

"Oh, don't laugh at me," I answered. "I have come to you, Dr. Follett, to consult you, because you said I might. But, please, first tell me how many minutes you can spare."

"My minutes at this hour of the day are at the

service of humanity," he replied, "but my first patient does not arrive just yet. You belong to Jane Gillespie, one of the women I most respect in the world, and I also like you heartily for yourself. Yes, I can attend to what you want to say. By the way first, have you heard what Erle has done?"

"No," I replied, looking up inquiringly. "Have you followed him up?"

"I have, and had an interview with him about a fortnight ago. He is a crack-brained fellow, always was. He has gone in madly for Christian Socialism, and has started a practice at Hoxton."

I did not reply. The words Christian Socialism had more or less an empty meaning to me. I had never given the subject serious thought.

Dr. Follett watched my face carefully.

"Erle is a good fellow," he said, "and if he were not such a rank enthusiast, might do splendidly in the profession. I have friends who could have helped him to a good practice, but he is quite morbid on the subject of the masses, believes that the Kingdom of God is amongst us, and all the rest. I respect him, of course, but—now you, although you were bracketed with him in your moment of triumph, are of different metal. I can perceive that you have a keen regard for the loaves and fishes."

I blushed, then I answered valiantly—

"I have. I mean to make money, a fortune if necessary; but I don't think, Dr. Follett, that money comes quite first. I honestly desire to benefit the race."

"Good, good," he replied. "Then where have you started practice?"

"Nowhere."

"Nowhere? It is some months now since that sunny May afternoon when you came like an apparition to Jane Gillespie's house and gave me a blow with the announcement that you, a woman, had studied medical sciences to such effect that you had taken honours."

"We need not discuss that any more, need we?" I said; "and I must not take up too much of your time. May I tell you what I have already done?"

I did tell him, giving him a very short and guarded account. He laughed heartily when I mentioned Dr. Sturgess.

"So you actually had the audacity to suppose that any *man* would become your partner," he said, chuckling as he spoke.

"I thought some man might," I replied; "I had hoped that false and narrow prejudice was gradually dying out, but I find myself mistaken."

I had taken good care not to mention what Dr. Sturgess had really said to me; all I told Dr. Follett about him was that I had met him at my club, had found him not at all the kind of man with whom I could work, and that, therefore, any arrangement between us was altogether impossible.

"And now, what do you suggest that I should do?" I said.

"If you were a man I should counsel you to take a hospital appointment as house physician or house surgeon, but being a woman, that is out of the question. Or stay, there are certain hospitals in East London which now take women as their house doctors. They are small places, of course; but they provide you

with board and lodging, and you get immense experience."

I shook my head.

"The proposition does not sound tempting," I said; "at the present moment I do not feel inclined to live in the slums."

"Ah! I thought you and Erle were made of different stuff," replied the old physician slowly, and then he looked at me and half sighed and turned away. Finally he said, speaking emphatically, "I am going to ask you a blunt question."

"What is that?"

"Have you private means?"

"I have about three hundred a year."

"Come, that is not bad. You can live until you find your practice. Take rooms in Queen Anne Street. I happen to know of an excellent ground floor, which can be secured if you go this very morning and apply to the agent. I will give you my card, which will practically clinch the matter. You will have to pay something like two hundred a year, but never mind."

"Must I take the rooms for a whole year?" I asked; "suppose no patients come?"

"You will have to arrange that with the agent. In a matter of this kind there is always a risk; still I believe you will do well. Take the rooms in any case, and put your plate on the door."

I rose quickly.

"I am taking up your time. I am most grateful to you," I said.

"Not at all, child," he replied, holding out his hand for me to clasp. "By the way, Dr. Gifford, what special

branch of the profession do you mean to take up? You will, of course, be a lady's doctor—that goes without saying."

"Why?" I asked. "My mission is to suffering humanity. If men come to see me, I shall not refuse my aid. Surely, Dr. Follett, in a profession such as ours we ought to drop the question of sex once and for ever."

He frowned and looked annoyed.

"You are all alike, you young enthusiasts," he said. "You fling yourselves against a great hard wall of prejudice, and think it will crumble at your touch. Well, I wish you luck; secure 100 Queen Anne Street if you can. Dr. Magillicuddy, who last lived there, was something of an eccentric, but that fact will do you no harm."

I heard the hall door bell ring.

"Ah! my first patient," said the doctor; "I asked him to be punctual. I have appointments now for every quarter of an hour until one o'clock. If I can help you in any way, let me know."

He hurried me out of the room, the automaton-like footman followed me, and I found myself in the street. With Dr. Follett's card in my pocket I went straight to the agent who had the letting of the ground floor of 100 Queen Anne Street. The moment he saw the card he treated me with respect, and offered to accompany me to the house. I found the rooms in a very dirty, almost ruinous condition; the walls begrimed with the smoke of years, the paint almost off the doors and wainscot. But the rooms themselves were large and lofty. There was one to the front which would do as the waiting-room for my

many patients when they began to arrive. There was a consulting-room at the back, a small surgery beyond that again, and a tiny room which I could make use of as a bedroom. The landlord said that if I took the floor for a year I could have it for one hundred and fifty pounds. He further promised to whitewash the ceilings, and to take the dirt off the paper. If I required the whole floor to be newly decorated he would be obliged to raise the rent.

I decided to do with the hideous papers and the dark and scratched paint, and to take this ground floor at its lowest rent. I might enter into possession on the following week, and I already gave directions with regard to the brass plate which was to be put upon the front door. I then hurried home to consult Jane Gillespie.

She was much astonished at what I had done; was inclined to remonstrate, and was almost tearful when she found that her opinions could not overcome my determination to act on Dr. Follett's advice.

"He disapproves of your folly with all his heart and soul; but you are so obstinate, Mary, that he felt there was no other answer to give you."

I smiled.

"Why should I have a different answer?" I replied. "I have got brains, and I think my fingers are capable."

I glanced at my hand as I spoke. How cool, how taper my fingers were, how firm too. I knew how deftly I could wield the most delicate surgical instruments, with what a sure, quiet touch I could perform the most dreaded operation; and yet, because I was a woman, the men and women of my own rank in life looked

askance at me. It was bitter. I tried to crush down the bitterness and to feel as cheerful as I could.

For the next few days I was very busy. My furniture had to be released from its "durance vile" in the warehouse and removed to Queen Anne Street. More furniture had to be added. Of course I must be as saving as possible; one hundred and fifty pounds was a very large item to take out of my small yearly income, and I could not hope for many patients for the first few months at least. Jane promised to get up a cold or some sort of ailment in order to give herself an excuse for visiting me. She said she would speak of me also to her lady friends.

"There is nothing like being the fashion," she said. "Now if you could invent some little drug, Molly, which would be a panacea for all aches and pains——"

"You surely do not intend that I should start as a quack?" I said, severity in my tone.

"Oh no, dear child, no, you must forgive me, but I understand so little of the red tapeism of the profession."

Jane hoped that I would smile, but I did not do so. At any risk, I must get her to respect me. She was a dear old soul, but she could not forget that she had known me as a small troublesome child, and that my father had been her greatest friend.

"I tell you what it is, Molly," she said at last, "you have never thought of one important item—you cannot live in your ground floor alone; who is to attend on you?"

Now I had thought this out very carefully.

"I will not go to the expense of a servant," I said.

"Other families live at the top of the house, so I shall not be lonely or at all afraid on that score. I can get my own breakfast quite well, and will go to a restaurant for dinner."

"And who will open the door for your patients?"

"I will hire a man for the purpose. He shall come to me each morning at ten and he can leave soon after one."

"Then I know the very man for your purpose," said Jane. "We will order the carriage and drive to see him this afternoon."

"Whom do you mean, Jane?" I asked.

"Don't you remember your father's old coachman, George Hudson? I happen to know that he is out of work. I happen also to know that since your dear father's death he became coachman to a doctor, Dr. Ford of Harley Street. He had an accident a year ago and was in hospital for a short time; he often comes to see me, and mentioned you more than once. He is the very person. I believe for love of you he would gladly enter once more into service, although his intention was to live on his small savings for the rest of his days."

We went to George Hudson's address and found him at home. He greeted me with astonishment, pretended to be shocked when he heard I was a lady doctor, but finally agreed to act as my factotum and serving man, with a twinkle in his humorous eyes which showed me that he would devote himself entirely to my services. I arranged with him to be at the house in Queen Anne Street on the following morning, and then went back to spend my last night with Jane Gillespie.



CHAPTER V

MY FACTOTUM—GEORGE



I ENTERED on my new profession accompanied by the three cardinal virtues, faith, hope, and love. Not that I possessed them in the religious sense; my feelings all tended towards materialism just then, but still these good visitants to any human heart did go with me. I had faith in myself and in my own power; I had considerable hope that I should succeed, and lead both a useful and happy life; and I had love for the human race as a race. To do good in the sense of ameliorating suffering, of delivering those prisoners who were tied and bound with the fear of death from bondage, would be all that my heart could desire.

I found my new quarters swept and garnished, clean after a fashion, and painfully bare. George and I set to work to make the place look homelike. I bought flowers, which I arranged in the consulting-room. George expostulated, and said that these were unusual luxuries, and that he was certain they would influence the patients in a way I did not intend. I took no notice of this, but insisted on my flowers. I placed them in tall, blue jars on the mantelpiece; I arranged a

great red bowl with all kinds of leaves on the centre table. Then I bought cheerful, up-to-date publications and laid them about, and looked at my waiting-room from every point of view, approving of it, and trying to picture to myself how the patients would feel when they thronged into its shelter. Some would be nervous, some hopeless, some, and those probably the most seriously affected, more or less indifferent to their fate. I pictured the different faces with their varied expressions, the tortured bodies longing for relief, the weary eyes seeking rest, and my own heart beat high. Yes, I had chosen a good life when I had decided to become a doctor; I would lead it in its fulness, I would be busy from morning till night.

The plate on my door also received my most careful attention. I had taken great pains to select the very prettiest letters with which it was to be engraved. "*Miss Mary Gifford, M.B., London*" looked, I thought, very well when so set out. It would show to the world at large that this shining light, this embryo genius, was at home to suffering humanity.

After my first morning, which was spent in putting things right, I became intensely cheerful. I chatted away to George, who had much to tell me, and a good deal of information to volunteer. The next day everything was in order, and there was an off-chance that one or two patients might call. Punctually then at the hour of ten I took my seat in my consulting-room, with my case-book handy, my blotting-pad on my desk, some nicely addressed paper before it, and a little drawer to the left, with a lock, where I could drop in my golden sovereigns.

I dressed myself with extreme care in the very best and closest-fitting dark-blue serge which could be made. I wore a narrow gold chain round my neck, and one flashing diamond ring on the third finger of my left hand, for I wished my patients when they did appear to see in me a thoroughly womanly girl. Nothing eccentric should they discern, however closely they peered, either in my dress or person. I sat down and waited; I felt remarkably nervous. George came once or twice to the door, entered, and looked at me approvingly.

“Now, miss,” said that worthy, “whatever you do, don’t you see ’em too soon after they come. Keep ’em waiting for at least five minutes, and then ring the bell for me. There is only one way to h’act so as to get the patients to come quickly—they must think, Miss Gifford, that you’re busy. They must think that it is the most wonderful chance their seeing you at all the morning they calls; you must make a great pint of that. When one of ’em rings I’ll show that person, be it man or woman, into the waiting-room, and I’ll just come and inform you. After doing that I’ll return to the room and say that Dr. Gifford is very busy, but she’ll *try* and see the patient if she can *within* the next twenty minutes. Then I’ll open the hall door with a flourish as if I was showing somebody out. I could get the wife to call some mornin’, miss, and dress up, so that the patients if they was looking out of the window might see her going down the steps. She has got a very stylish black silk dress and a velvet mantle, what belonged to my late master’s wife. I could do it, and I would, I know she wouldn’t mind. You must get the

patients by guile, miss, and that I'm telling you. There's nothing in all the world like having it said that you has more patients than you can well see."

"Thank you, George," I replied, "there may be worldly policy in some of your remarks, but how about the truth? If I wish to keep up a high moral character I must be known for my truthfulness, George."

George gave me a compassionate glance; I saw that he pitied me, and was quite determined to take his own way.

"You leave the matter of showing the patients in to me, miss," he said. "That's my look-out. I've not been doctor's coachman for five years for nothing. I'm proud to serve you, Miss Gifford, but I can only do it in my own way."

During that first morning I did leave matters to George, and I am bound to say he had an idle time. I heard him pacing up and down the hall. Once or twice I heard the hall door open; I have no doubt he was standing on the steps. It would have surprised me very little if he had there and then cajoled some hapless wayfarer into the house. Once or twice he approached the door of the consulting-room, but did not again intrude.

I felt nervous, and as the hours went by, more or less depressed. It would be very, very dull indeed if I had to sit so morning after morning waiting for those people who did not need me. Here was I, primed and ready with all the latest data at my fingers' ends, with my medical book handy, with my brains stored with facts which might give back life to many, and yet the dying, the suffering, the needy did not come to me.

No one rang the front door bell. No one was ushered

into the consulting-room. No bell was required to be rung by me in order that imaginary patients might leave my consulting-room. I sat and turned page after page of the *Lancet*, and looked through the last volume of Clifford Allbutt's "System of Medicine," and tried to fancy that I did not mind.

At one o'clock George took his leave. When he did so, he told me not to be at all discouraged, that the plate hadn't, so to speak, took yet, but in a day or two he hoped matters would be very different.

The next morning he arrived in good time, and was aggravatingly cheerful.

"You see, Miss Gifford," he said, "these rooms were used last by the lamented Dr. Magillicuddy, the great bone specialist, and it stands to nature, miss, no one would think that a young lady would be the one to set bones. I saw one or two people going by and remarking to themselves on the door-plate. P'raps they was coming here about aching bones, but natural like they wouldn't come when they saw it was a *Miss Mary Gifford, M.B.* You must bear up, miss, you'll have your patients all in good time; and once they sees you, miss"—here George expressed, by a pantomime of feature, what a startling and brilliant effect my appearance would have upon the men and women who consulted me.

I could scarcely keep from smiling. I really felt very grateful to George for his condescension and the vast amount of information he gave me with regard to medical matters.

"There is such a thing as cajoling the public," he continued; "you must let them think you're fair run

to death. You hasn't ordered your carriage yet, has you, miss?"

"My carriage," I answered, with a laugh; "I certainly do not mean to keep one."

"You ought," said George, with a profound sigh. "There's no use in doing things by 'alves. Run to death you ought to seem, and your brougham ought to stand at the door sharp at one o'clock every morning, that's a fact, miss, and I'm tellin' you as one who knows."

I had been over a week in Queen Anne Street when, one morning about half-past ten, there came a ring to the front door. My factotum happened to be with me at the moment, he immediately put on a most solemn face.

"Now, don't you get nervous," he said. He trotted off to reply to the ring. In a couple of minutes he came back to say that an old lady had called, that by her looks he didn't think much of her, but had shown her, as a matter of course, into the waiting-room. He further informed me that he had told my patient he thought it most unlikely Dr. Gifford could see her that morning, as she had not made an appointment, but that he would inquire. I shook my head at her most solemn," said George.

"Has you made an appointment?" I said.

"No," she replied; "but can the doctor see me?"

"Scarcely likely," I says, "but I'll ask. Perhaps Dr. Gifford will appoint to see you to-morrow or next day, ma'am. She is very busy—run to death, so to speak."

"Really, George, you have told a downright lie."

"And how are you to get on if I don't tell a few tarradiddles?" replied George, winking solemnly as he spoke. "When I undertook this post, I undertook to see

you through, Miss Gifford, and see you through I will. The lady is a Mrs. Saunders—here's her card."

He laid the card with a certain contempt on the table.

"Now, miss," he continued, "if you are wise, and will take the advice of a man who has been, so to speak, behind the scenes for the last six years, you will send word by me that you are very sorry, but that you haven't a moment to spare this morning, and that you'll see Mrs. Saunders on Thursday, at eleven o'clock sharp, if she'll have the goodness to make an appointment. You won't see her this morning, Dr. Gifford, that is if you'll take the advice of a man who has been behind the scenes."

"George," I replied, rising as I spoke, "I cannot take your advice. I am too human and too impatient. I have waited nearly ten days for Mrs. Saunders, and I simply cannot resist the opportunity of seeing her at once. Show her in without a moment's delay."

George shook his head.

"T'aint the right thing to do," he said. He left the room very unwillingly, crossed the hall with deliberation, and opened the waiting-room door. The next moment I heard an anxious voice in the hall, my room door was opened, and a lady of about fifty entered. She was a very thin woman, with a fretful expression of face. One glance showed me that she belonged to the neurotic portion of the race. As she came forward, she peered at me through her *pince-nez*.

"So you are one of the new devices of the evil one—a lady doctor?" she cried. "I have called more out of curiosity than anything else; and you are so terribly young."

"Will you sit down?" I said.

It would not do to appear subservient to my patients, but as a matter of fact I was trembling all over. The passing my final exam., the walking to Burlington House to see if my name were in the lists, were mere nothings to the trepidation which I felt in the company of my first patient.

"I am sorry you think so badly of lady doctors," I said; "but as you have called, I suppose you mean to consult me. What can I do for you? Your name, I think, is Mrs. Saunders."

"It is. I have been a widow for several years. Don't you resent the tone in which I have spoken?"

"No," I replied; "for if you are going to be frank with me, I shall be equally frank with you. I am sorry that you are so prejudiced. Why should women doctors be inventions of Satan? I imagined that we were doing a great deal of good in the world, and were taking the place of men in cases which women are far more suitable to deal with. We have difficulties to encounter, there is not the slightest doubt."

"Not the slightest doubt," she repeated, nodding her head. "Dr. Gifford, you are frank; I am also frank. I spoke rudely, and I apologise. I believe lady doctors can be a great blessing to the race, and particularly to women; but I came to see you out of curiosity. I am suffering, and was about to consult a doctor. I saw the name on your door, noticed that you had taken Dr. Magillcuddy's rooms—extraordinary man he was—thought that I would come in. Well, here I am. There is one comfort, I can speak out freely to a woman doctor."

"You certainly can, and do," I replied.

She smiled.

"Well," she continued, "I will tell you about myself; but will you first answer me a question?"

"I will," I said. I felt that my eyes were shining, and my nervousness had vanished. Mrs. Saunders was a patient after my own heart.

"Do you know anything at all about the usual formula?" she continued. "Perhaps I had better instruct you. You will excuse me; you know you look so very young, and so inexperienced."

I could not help blushing now with annoyance. If only George had heard her!

"You begin, you know," she continued, tapping off her questions on her fingers, by "inquiring the age, that's question number one; then you ask whether the patient is married or single, question number two; and question number three is, What do you suffer from? Now, I'll answer your questions before you ask them. My name is Saunders; I have been a widow for five years; I am fifty-four years of age; I suffer from a painful form of rheumatism."

"What are your symptoms?" I asked.

"Look at this hand and you'll know for yourself."

"Rheumatoid Arthritis," I murmured.

"Say those two unpleasant words again."

I repeated them.

"The state of my hands is reproduced in my feet. I can walk with difficulty, I suffer from intense pain in all the joints, in consequence I am often irritated in my mind, my nights are sleepless. Now, what treatment do you recommend?"

"The treatment will necessarily be tedious," I answered, "and the effect slow."

“Do you make rheumatism your speciality?”

“At the present moment I have no speciality,” I replied. “I have studied medicine exhaustively, and am also a surgeon, but as I have just come from my medical studies I can perhaps say that I am up in the newest ideas with regard to all sorts of diseases. Now Rheumatoid Arthritis——”

“Yes, yes,” she interrupted, “how pleased you seem when you murmur that disagreeable name!”

“The special form of rheumatism from which you suffer,” I continued, “is acknowledged by the profession to be——”

“Don’t say it,” she cried, springing to her feet. “Others have told me so; they say there is no hope, that it is incurable.”

“It may be relieved,” I answered, “but you must go through a most exhaustive course, and I am not the person to treat you. I should recommend you to go at once to Bath, or some other place where there are special waters for this form of disease.”

“I know all that. I have been to dozens of doctors. I see you are just like the rest.” She stood up and held out her hand.

“You are a good girl,” she said, “and I like you, although you are a lady doctor. You will, of course, only attend members of your own sex? Why did you not mention that fact upon your hall door plate? Suppose a man should come to see you, what a terrible position you would then be in!”

“I cannot see it,” I replied in some indignation. “If a man comes to see me, and I feel that I can benefit him, I shall certainly do so.”

"But this is fearful. Have you no sense of shame, no feelings due to your own sex?"

"Why should I not relieve a man's sufferings if I can?" I replied. "You don't exclude men who are very ill from the services of a nurse, and why should lady doctors be prohibited?"

"Dr. Gifford, I read obstinacy in your chin. As you have not made rheumatism your speciality, I will not stay any longer. Here is my fee; do you take one or two guineas?"

"None from you, for I have not prescribed."

"Oh, don't be huffy, that is a dreadful mistake. A doctor should have tact. Now that factotum who let me in was full of tact. Where did you get hold of such a treasure. He gave me to understand that I had scarcely any hope of seeing you to-day. Is it true that you are so much run after?"

"I will whisper the truth to you," I answered; "you are my first patient."

"Ah, how amusing and *naïve* of you to confess; but *what* a treasure you have secured in that servant. I dare say others will come to you presently. I like your frankness. I have no doubt, with your servant's help, you will get a practice in time. I am going to Bath immediately, and I am under the care of Dr. ——" (she mentioned one of the most famous names in London for the treatment of the particular disease from which she suffered).

"The fact is," she continued, "I came here to-day to try you. How long have you been an M.B. of London?"

I told her.

"Then of course you have had no experience?"

"None in the ordinary sense of the word," I replied, "but I have passed my degree with honours."

"Well, you have a nice frank manner, child," she said at last, tapping me affectionately on the arm. "I think you ought to take a fee—I wish you would."

"No, no," I answered, "I have not prescribed—it would be impossible."

As I spoke I rang the bell for George. He appeared after a moment's deliberation, flung open the door, and stood like an automaton on the threshold.

"Do recommend me to your friends," I could not help saying as Mrs. Saunders was leaving the room. It was a terrible thing to do, and as I did so I caught the reproachful eye of George. There was no show of life whatever about his face except in that warning left eye, which just flashed at me for a moment and then fixed itself upon my patient.

He showed the lady out with due solemnity, and then came back to warn me.

"You've done for yourself," he said. "Ask her to recommend you to her friends! She will have it all over the place now that you can't get patients for love or money. You didn't take my advice, I who have been behind the scenes, but you'll rue it, yes, you'll rue it."

But I was very cheerful over my first patient, and would not allow even George to discourage me. He retired slowly from the room, shutting the door after him.

Mrs. Saunders was my first patient, and, as far as I could tell, she promised to be my last. No one else called that day—nor the next—nor the next—nor the next: I thought I might just as well go out and enjoy myself. I told George so; he shook his head.

"You ain't a-going to give in yet," he said. "They'll come, they'll come. I mean to polish up that plate so bright that the name shall glitter in the sun to-morrow morning, it can't help drawing in the end, and there are other ways. I'm going to report it all down the street that you're worn to a shadder looking after your patients. It'll get out; there's nothing like a rumour. Ah! there's a ring at the front door."

The sound absolutely startled me. I flushed first, then turned pale.

"Better luck this time," said George; "and now do keep your own counsel, and look as worried as you like, anything to make 'em think you're fairly dazed with overwork."

He left me. I heard his solemn voice in the hall, another voice was raised in protest, then the waiting-room door was shut behind the new patient. George came and tapped at the consulting-room door. I said, "Come in, George. Now what fresh humbug are you after?"

"It's a lady has called, doctor," he began.

"A patient?" I cried; "for goodness sake show her in at once. I am quite ready, I can give her my fullest attention. Is it Mrs. Saunders again?"

"It is not, miss, and I now solemnly advise you, as you value your future, and the time when you will have more patients than you can well look after, to keep this lady waiting for a least a quarter of an hour. I took the opportunity of telling her private that you were much occupied, and that as she had not made an appointment, I scarcely thought it possible you could see her this morning."

"And what did she say?" I asked.

"It don't matter what she said," replied George; "keep her waiting, that's the main thing."

"But I must insist on knowing what she said."

"Well I'm sorry to have to report, Miss Gifford, that she hasn't come as a patient. In short, miss, she's your cousin, Miss Gillespie."

"Do let me see her at once," I cried. "Stand out of the way."

"Now, that's just the very point, doctor. If Miss Gillespie can go back and say to her friends—she has a large circle of friends—that you're overpowered by work, why, the patients will come. All you has to do is to keep your own counsel when you do see her, and to let her think that you are worked to death. She will do it; she is the one of all others to do it; I know her, and she sees more visitors in one week than most ladies do in a month, and you'll be made. Now, my dear young lady, I knew your father and served him well, do be guided by me in this matter."

The tears very nearly came into the good fellow's eyes.

"Just wait a quarter of an hour," he pleaded, "if for no other reason not to expose me. I told Miss Gillespie so positive that you hadn't a single moment to spare. I gave her to understand, and I hope you won't betray me, miss, that you has two waiting-rooms, and that there was from ten to twelve ladies biding your pleasure in the other one. She seemed wonderfully impressed, and offered me two shillings to get her in first to see you. So I said I'd just put her into a sitting-room all to herself, but I couldn't accept her kindness as far as the money—because I have a bit of a conscience after all. Don't you give me away, please, miss."

George was now terribly in earnest, but I could not yield to him in this matter. I must see Jane, and at once. He left me at last, and a moment later brisk little Jane trotted into the room.

"Now, my dear, good, extraordinary doctor, how are you getting on?" she cried. "I am right glad to hear you are so terribly busy."

George was still standing on the threshold. He looked at me with unutterable reproach and pleading. I glanced away from him.

"I must not keep the others waiting," continued Jane in her bright voice, "so many of them in the waiting-room; I won't stay more than a minute."

"You can shut the door, George," I said.

He disappeared with extreme unwillingness.

"Jane," I said, "sit down. Poor George has told you a figment of his imagination; I have been here nearly three weeks and have had one patient."

"Oh, my poor child, how dull and dismal for you. What a humbug our dear George is, but he has your true interest at heart. Now, my dear Molly, this is exactly as I feared. People will not consult lady doctors. Of course in certain hospitals they are permitted, but for a lady to set up here is simply to court failure. I doubt if you will ever get any one to consult you, and really, Miss Mary Gifford, M.B., London, looks most masculine and unpleasant on the front door."

"Dear Jane," I answered, "have we not discussed that subject often enough before? I only mention to you now that I have no patients in order to let you see that I have time to attend to you."

"If you have no patients you may as well come out with me. My carriage is at the door."

I shook my head.

"George would never forgive me," I answered.

"Dear me, Molly, this is beyond bearing; are you to become the slave of George Hudson?"

"Not exactly, but he has taken me in hand. He has faithfully promised to pilot my boat into harbour, and I have learned to dread his frown. George is a man of considerable character, and he is exercising it now in my behalf."

"Then when are your hours for seeing your patients over?" asked Jane.

"At one o'clock."

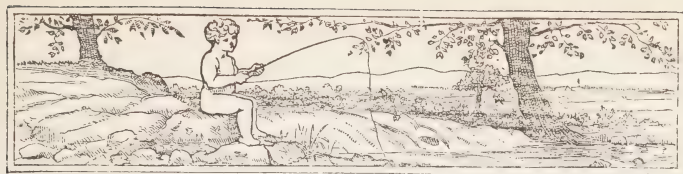
"It is now twelve. I will come back at one and call for you. By the way, I saw Dr. Follett yesterday, and he was inquiring after you. Why don't you consult him? He could send you plenty of patients if he chose."

"No, I must find them for myself," I answered.

Jane sat and considered.

"I really do think you have made a terrible mistake in embracing medicine as your profession," she said, "and it has cost so much money too. The best thing you can do is to get married as soon as possible."

Jane rose, and soon afterwards left the house.



CHAPTER VI

THE NEW SOCIALISM



LUNCHEd with Jane, and afterwards went home with her to tea. As usual she had many callers, and amongst others Dr. Follett. He treated me just as he would any other lady in whom he was fairly interested. He did not even ask me if I had taken the rooms in Queen Anne Street. He never alluded to my medical experience, or rather want of experience. He was jovial and agreeable, and only that I caught his eye once or twice regarding me gravely, I might almost have been inclined to doubt the fact that he remembered that I was a member of the same profession as his own.

I spent a pleasant evening, and went home to Queen Anne Street after late dinner. Thus my novitiate commenced, and in much the same dull state did it continue during the winter which immediately followed, and also through the long spring months. Notwithstanding all George's battles in my cause I still remained unknown and unemployed. There were moments when this fact tried me inexpressibly, and my evenings were often so dull that I did not know how to get through them.

On a certain night towards the middle of the following

May, when the weather had suddenly become almost sultry, I had retired into my consulting-room and tried to bury myself in a difficult paper on mental pathology. I was just getting interested when the front door bell rang sharply. I went to open it somewhat unwillingly. Patients would certainly not arrive at this hour, and what was the meaning of the ring? I opened the door to see my old friend Laura Barrington standing on the steps.

"Oh, how glad I am to see you," I exclaimed. "You have never been near me for months."

"I am working too hard," she answered. "You know I am to go in for my final in June. Now, I have not a moment to lose—I came here on the chance. I am just off to Hoxton to attend a lecture. Who do you think is giving it?"

"I am sure I don't know," I answered. "I wish you would come in, I am feeling so lonely."

"You are not to be lonely another moment—I mean to take you with me. The man who is lecturing is your special chum, as I always shall call him, Dr. John Erle. People say that he is wonderfully eloquent, and quite exciting attention. Do put on your hat at once, Molly; I have a ticket for you as well as myself. We shall get there in good time if we make haste."

I let Laura have her way. She followed me into my little bedroom at the back of the consulting-room. I put on my hat and jacket, slipped my purse into my pocket, and a moment later was out in the street with my friend.

"How nice it is to see you again!" I said, affection in my tones.

"Of course I am delighted to see you too, Molly; but let me tell you something—you look terribly hipped. How are the patients getting on? How does the profession seem now that you have embraced it? Are you busy all day? You did a bold thing to take these rooms, and they must be terribly expensive. I suppose you have quite a nice little connection already?"

"Don't imagine it, Laura," I answered. "The profession as far as I am concerned is a perfect sham. Patients do not want me. They pass my door every day. I hear their footsteps as they pass me by. None of them come near me. 'Miss Mary Gifford, M.B., London,' presents no attractions to them. Her knowledge is at their service, but they don't avail themselves of it. Oh! I would attend them for nothing, just for the mere pleasure of diagnosing the different cases. I wish I were back again at the hospital in Gray's Inn Road. We had a busy time then, had we not?"

"I have a busy time still. I am working harder than ever. I don't mean you to outdo me, Molly. If you passed your final with honours I mean to do likewise. But now here we are, we must take this omnibus."

"I have not the faintest idea how to get to Hoxton," I said. "By the way, where is Hoxton?"

"Oh, at the city side of Highbury. Have you never heard of Sir Walter Besant's 'Children of Gibeon'? He laid the scene in Hoxton. I believe it is about the ugliest place in London, and a great resort of thieves."

"Indeed," I replied, "that sounds singularly inviting. I am sorry I brought my purse with me."

"Where is your purse, by the way?"

"In my pocket."

"Oh, that will never do. Put it into the pocket inside your jacket, where it will be safe. You can keep sixpence in your glove for your omnibus fare. Now, is not this nice and adventurous? I wonder what kind of lecture John Erle will give?"

"Where are we going?" I asked; "where is he to lecture?"

"Oh, in a hall of some kind near Holy Trinity Church, Hoxton. They have started a new Settlement there. I had an invitation from one of the Sisters. You know that Mr. Erle practises as a doctor at Hoxton. By the way, Molly, I wonder if he also waits morning after morning for patients?"

"I wish you would not laugh at me," I said. "You will know what it means when you yourself are fully qualified. After all, Laura, there is no help for it, I doubt if there is room for women doctors in London."

"Room? Plenty," said Laura yawning, and looking out of the window. She was a tall, finely-made young woman, with a great deal of aplomb and assurance in her manner. I felt myself small and insignificant by her side.

After a very long drive in the omnibus we changed into a tramcar, and finally found ourselves on our feet in a completely new region. We walked down a broad street, and after asking different people, reached our destination. A lady, dressed in the quiet garb of a Sister, was standing by the door of the hall where the lecture was to be held. She motioned to us where we might secure seats, and we entered the building. It was

a very large room, and was already crowded. Most of the people who were present were working men, but I also saw a few women and one or two children. Another Sister saw us and motioned us up to a somewhat prominent part of the room. Laura and I sat down on a bench side by side. The proceedings were opened with an address from the Vicar, who was extremely hearty and to the point. He was humorous as well as thoughtful, and his remarks caused loud guffaws of laughter to echo through the room. At the conclusion of his address a hymn was sung, and then the Vicar rose again and introduced John Erle to the notice of the meeting.

"Dr. Erle," said Mr. Robson, was well known to many of those present; the Vicar was quite certain that every man and woman in the room would listen with attention to Dr. Erle's words.

The next moment my fellow-student, the man with whom I had shared honours in the proudest moment of my life, sprang to his feet. He had a keen face, the keenest I had ever seen. His eyes had a sparkle of light in them, and a way of looking through you just as though they meant to take your secrets and make them his own. There was a strong note of individuality about him, and he was absolutely wanting in all self-consciousness. He was so intensely interested, so all-absorbed by the words he was about to utter, the thing he was about to do, that he had no time to think of self. His voice was rather low, and he spoke with deliberation, but his utterance was so clear, and his words so emphatic, that they immediately aroused attention. In the large room I am certain that voice was heard to the farthest end. The whispering, the shuffling of feet, the indescribable

sounds which must be so aggravating to any orator, gradually ceased until the proverbial pin might have been heard to drop.

Dr. Erle was the first man whom I had ever heard explain that term of the present day, Christian Socialism. He did so very briefly, and I gathered from his discourse a few salient points, which were as sheet-anchors to me in my future life.

"The question of questions," he said, "which we have got to discuss to-night, is the following: 'Is it well to apply religion to the great social problem?'"

"I say emphatically that it is. I believe in Christianity, and believing in it, I cannot treat it with indifference. It must be reckoned with; it must be either denied and rejected, or accepted and acted upon. Yes, my men, I believe in Christianity." Here he paused, then, bending forward, he gave a few emphatic and almost startling reasons for his belief. The working men craned their necks to listen.

"Those are to my mind conclusive arguments," he continued. "They have stood the test of the ages, and will stand the test of all time. Christianity has a solid foundation, and to all those who truly and emphatically believe in it, it must appear the most important thing in the world. Christianity is true. Ought it to be applied to social reform? Yes. Why? The Bible says so. In the New as well as the Old Testament, Christianity is plainly represented as a religion for this present life, and for the guidance and help of a nation in its social affairs. The prophets were pre-eminently social reformers. They gave directions about every kind of political and social matter;

they sternly rebuked employers of labour who did not give fair wages; they found fault with those who oppressed the poor. Then, according to the Bible, what are the tests by which a man shall be approved or condemned at the Day of Judgment? Did he feed the hungry? Did he satisfy the thirsty? Did he look after the aliens, the badly clothed, the sick, the prisoners? If he was found wanting, JESUS CHRIST told him that he was neglecting his duty to Him. What stronger ground for Christian social reform could possibly be found? Our LORD and our Master says to us, Look to your Social Problems, spend your energy on the relief of your suffering brethren. If you do not, you reject and despise Me. Depart, ye cursed!

"Why is social reform needed? We Christians tell you that the root of the evil, or the cause of the failure in life, is Sin. Yes, Sin with a capital letter. Failure takes many guises, but its cause is Sin. Its most hideous guise is selfishness. Selfishness is so plausible; it appeals so to a man's lowest and worst instincts. Now, Christianity knocks selfishness on the head, for the very essence of its being is unselfishness. What we want, then, is to apply Christianity to our selfishness, and so to knock it out of sight. We Christians know only one power which can do that—the power of JESUS CHRIST, who taketh away the sin of the world. Who was the greatest social reformer in the world? JESUS CHRIST. He is the enemy of all unrighteousness, He is the Divine King, He is the General under whom those soldiers who wish to conquer ought to place themselves. It is because His will has been offended against that the social condition of the world presents

such ghastly confusion. To put CHRIST into the daily life is the *one motive power*; to make Him once and for ever the Master and King is the true, the only remedy."

John Erle began to speak rapidly; the enthusiasm which possessed him overpowered the slower and more reflective utterances. He heaped on metaphor after metaphor, arguing, warming to his subject, hurling down one objection after another. There was a momentary silence when he ceased, broken by a storm of applause.



CHAPTER VII

THE NILE



AURA and I found ourselves hustled out into the street.

"I forgot to tell you, Molly," she cried, "that Sister Agnes Howard has asked us both to spend to-night at the Maurice Hostel. It is much too late to go home. She said she would meet us at the door; let us wait for her."

We stood a little aside, and allowed the crowd to stream out.

"I like what Dr. Erle said," exclaimed my companion. I made no answer.

"He put a wonderful grip into the thing," continued Laura. "If modern Christianity is really like that, it seems to be a possession worth coveting."

Still I did not reply.

"How intensely in earnest he was," continued my companion; "quite as if he belonged to the Early Ages. There was something in being a Christian in those days. You had to be awfully plucky; you carried your life in your hands; you were buffeted, stoned, torn asunder. Why, Molly, what is the matter?"

"Nothing," I said.

"But why don't you speak?"

"Because I can't."

"You cannot? Is it because you are ashamed, or—you don't believe in the thing?"

"I believe, and I am not ashamed, but I—I feel it all too much."

Laura looked puzzled. She had fine dark eyes; they were full of emotion. Suddenly she touched my arm, and pressed me back towards the door. Dr. Erle was coming out. The lamplight fell on his face; it showed pale and worn. The eagerness had left his eyes. He hurried out without seeing us.

"I believe that is a really good fellow," said Laura. "I should like to know him. In some ways it must be interesting to work down here."

The crowd continued to pour out.

"Where can Sister Agnes be?" said Laura again.

"Had we not better go to the Settlement and wait for her there?" I suggested.

"Oh no, I don't know my way. The Settlement is in a new street, not far off, I am sure, but the place does look so slummy. Oh, there is Mr. Robson; I have a good mind to speak to him."

She alluded to the Vicar of Holy Trinity, who was just then leaving the building; but somebody else had attracted his attention, and he passed on, not noticing where we two girls stood together.

"I cannot imagine what has come to Sister Agnes," continued Laura. "Shall we go and look for her? Oh, there, I see her in the crowd; wait for me, Molly, I'll be back in a minute."

Before I could remonstrate Laura had left me, rushing

into the thickest part of the crowd of men and women. I stood up against the little shelter of the porch, and hoped that no one would notice me. There was a public-house across the way, and its bright light streamed out upon the roadway. The warm day had turned to a very wet night, and the pavement was dripping. I was still thinking of Dr. Erle's speech, and was wondering what chance Christian Socialism really had in these parts. Was it strong enough to crush out Sin? That was the point. A boy came up, and touched me on the sleeve.

"You're wanted," he said; "you're to foller me."

He was a very small, thin boy, and had bright blue eyes, which sparkled in his white face.

"You're wanted," he continued; "you're to come along o' me at once."

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Jerry's my name, and you're to come along with me now."

"Who sent you? Why am I to go with you?"

"The lydy; she said you was to come at once."

"To the Maurice Hostel?" I asked eagerly.

The lad nodded.

"Come," he said, "don't keep me. This wy, lydy."

He rushed on in front, and, quite unsuspecting, I went after him. We turned down several streets, the lad whistling and dancing in front of me. Suddenly he turned abruptly to his right, winked to me to follow him, and ran down some steps. I found myself in a sort of court, lined by houses at either side, with a narrow pathway in the middle. Dark as it was, the place was alive with men, women, and children. The

women were leaning up against lamp-posts, talking, jeering, laughing, blaspheming. The men were egging them on. The children were wallowing in the dirt. A woman ran up to the boy and said something; he nodded and glanced back at me.

"She's got a jerry for certain, and also a slang," I heard him say, "and there ain't a nark anywhere near." Then he winked at me, and, turning back, tried to catch hold of my arm. There was nothing for it but to follow him, but for the first time my suspicions were aroused.

"How soon shall we get to the hostel?" I asked.

"Ain't I tiking yer there as fast as ever I can?" was the reply. He turned and looked me in the face. I looked back at him. His eyes sparkled once again; they were so bright as to resemble jewels. Suddenly, to my astonishment, he made a somersault, stood for an instant on his head, then came up and spoke. "Guv me twopence," he cried, "and I'll let yer orf."

"Let me off? What do you mean?"

"Don't you ask no questions. Guv me tuppence and I won't tike yer no farther. This ain't your lay; you'd best get out while you can. You give me tuppence, and I'll let yer orf."

I opened my purse and put sixpence into the lad's hand.

"I have not an idea where I am," I said. "I want to get to the Maurice Hostel; take me there at once. There, I am paying you beforehand. I trust you."

"Oh, my Gawd!" I heard him murmur, "I don't like this. There are lydies *and* lydies. There's them as we can take the oof from, and there's them as we

can't. Look 'ere, lydy, I won't tike yer through the Nile; there! I has said it."

"Through the Nile!" I cried. "What do you mean?"

"You arsk any copper what the Nile means, and he'll tell yer," cried the lad.

He took hold of my hand.

"I say, I'd rayther not hev your sixpence; I'll tike yer out of this, that I will."

"What did you say your name was?" I asked.

"Jerry."

"Well, Jerry, I like you, and"—I hesitated a moment, and then I said stoutly, "I trust you."

The boy grinned; a queer sort of three-cornered smile radiated his mouth for an instant, but before I could say another word a woman rushed up, a great, bare-armed virago, caught the lad by the scruff of his neck, and hurled him inside the nearest house. The door of the house opened to receive him, and shut instantly.

I had felt uneasy before, but scarcely frightened. Now, for the first time in my whole life, I owned to a sensation of physical fear. My position was the reverse of enviable. The Nile—whatever the boy meant by the Nile—was evidently an undesirable place, and must be close at hand; but where was the Maurice Hostel?

The hour was close on midnight. It rained hard. Had I been dressed in the costume of a nurse or sister, I knew I should not have much to fear; but I was in the ordinary neat clothes of a girl whose home is in the West of London. The gulf between East

and West was never more apparent to me than at that moment. But I was naturally brave, and full of spirit, and would not allow my fears to get the better of me. I slipped my purse inside the pocket of my coat and hurried forward. I did not know where I was going, and dared not ask any one the way. To my relief, the woman who had suddenly dragged the boy out of sight had not followed me. I took the first turning to the left. A broad street lay before me. At the first glance it did not look specially repulsive, but the people were all out of doors, and the people made it hideous. There were flaring torches lighting up barrows which held different sorts of provisions. Men and women were haggling and fighting. All of a sudden a small child of two tottered down the steps of a rickety house and ran half-way across the street. A woman shrieked to the child, and a drunken man, who was pushing a wheelbarrow loaded with scrap iron, uttered a hideous curse. He knocked suddenly up against the child, the barrow was upset, the iron fell about the road, and a great piece struck the baby on the head. It uttered one sharp cry and lay still. My professional instincts were immediately to the fore. I forgot all danger in the earnest wish to use my medical knowledge for the benefit of the child. Before any one could interfere I was kneeling in the middle of the road, and the baby was lying in my arms. There was a cut on its left temple, an ugly deep cut. It lay perfectly quiet.

"Can any one get brandy," I said, looking up. "This child is seriously hurt."

A woman touched me on the arm.

"You git away," she said. "The biby's all right. I know who she is; she belongs to Liz Pratt. You git out of this while you can."

The woman who spoke was large and brawny; her arms were bare to the elbows; she had a cut on her own cheek, and her black hair was hanging in matted profusion over her forehead and down her neck. The bosom of her dress was slightly open, and she wore a short petticoat.

"You git away," she repeated, "this ain't no plice for the likes of you."

But I took no notice; I was still bending over the child. I felt its tiny wrist, and looked into its thin face. The face was thin to emaciation, the forehead protruded, the skin was drawn so tightly over the temples that the bones had almost worked their way through. I lifted the lids over the shut eyes and gazed into the pupils. I put my hand on the heart—it was still. There was no pulse in the little wrist. I stood up then, still holding the child in my arms.

"Take it," I said to the woman, "it is dead."

A crowd had already collected round me, but when I said the words, just for half a moment there was a lull, then some one uttered a cry, and another took it up, and then every voice in the street called out loud and shrill—

"Liz Pratt, where are yer? Come and tike yer biby, it's gorn and got killed. The lydy says so, and she's——"

"A doctor," I answered.

"She's a lydy doctor, and she says your biby's killed. Come and tike it."

In answer to this summons the sound of steps run-

ning quickly was heard, and a tall, very thin woman, with a fierce face and crimson cheeks, appeared on the scene. The moment she saw me she rushed on me (I was still holding the child), tore it from my arms, and looked at it attentively. She then began to rock it backwards and forwards.

"Who dares to say it's dead?" she cried, in a voice excited by drink.

"The lydy," said a member of the crowd, "and she's a doctor."

"Lydy!" repeated the woman; "I'll lydy her. Take that for yer imperence"—and she dealt me a sounding blow across my mouth. I staggered back, too stunned by the sudden blow to know what I was doing; but the action of Liz Pratt seemed to be as the match to gunpowder. The next instant I was surrounded, jostled, pushed; murmurs were heard in the air—"She's sure to have a jerry and a slang about her. We'll get the swag, there ain't no coppers near. She's a good 'un, she is."

I found myself pushed against my will inside a house. I was hurried down a passage and then into a small room to my right.

"Now I'll lydy yer," said Liz Pratt; "you say agen to my face that my biby is killed, you'd better."

She laid the little body of the child carelessly on a table and approached me with her arms akimbo.

"How can I tell you didn't knock it down yourself? You has got to answer me; you don't get out of this for nothing. Now then, strip, and out with the swag."

"I will not give you anything," I answered quietly.

"You won't? We'll soon see who's master 'ere.

Jimmy, where are yer? Jimmy, go and fetch feyther from the Green Dragon; tell 'im we 'as got a lydy 'ere, and she won't give up the oof. You go along, Jimmy. Ann Spicer, you come and help."

I had never greatly feared death, and at that moment the universal foe lost its terrors. The baby on the table, with the smile of GOD growing and deepening each moment on its little face, was my guarantee that the Angel of Death was strong, not terrible. At the worst, I too could lie in his arms. I would not be afraid, I would not lose my self-control. I turned quickly to the woman—

"Why are you so cruel to me?" I said. "I have done you no harm. I was walking down the street, and I saw a man knock your little child down. I picked it up; I would have saved it if I could. I am a doctor. Would you do violence to me? I held your child in my arms as it breathed its last. Come over and look at it."

I took her unwilling hand and dragged her towards the table.

"Look," I continued, "do you see that smile; the baby is quite happy, its pains are over, it sees its angel."

The woman gazed full at me as if my words had stunned her, she then bent and touched the cheek of the baby with the tip of her finger, but the next instant she had shaken herself and burst into a loud laugh.

"You're a blooming bloke!" she cried; "so you're trying to preach to the likes o' me. Why, you ain't a Sister, nor a Mission woman, nor a Scripser reader, nor anything of that sort, what hev a right, after a fashion.

I say it's like your imperence. I don't care whether you touched my biby or not, you're here, and we'll have the oof. Now then, out with your money, and out with yer watch and yer chain, and no more bones."

"I have neither a watch nor chain about my person," I said. "But I have got a purse." I laid it quietly on the table. "There's a sovereign in it and some shillings. Now open the door and let me go."

Ann Spicer ran forward. She whispered a word in the other woman's ear. I heard her say something about my dress. The next instant the two viragoes were on me. They struggled to unfasten my skirt. I struggled too. To lose my money was one thing, to lose my clothes another.

"You shall not have my clothes," I said; "if you have courage, so have I. I am not going to be afraid of you. You surely don't want to kill me. What good will it do you to take my life?"

"Lor! you ain't the fust," said the woman; "we're rough in this plice, there ain't no denying of it. Do you know where you air?"

I did not reply.

"In the Nile."

Here the two women laughed.

"The biggest thieves' quarters in the whole of Lunnon—there!"

But Liz Pratt's words were interrupted. Steps were heard quickly approaching, a boy's voice called in a shrill tone—

"Hers in there, I see her go."

"O Jerry!" I cried; "Jerry, come and help me—help me."

For, after all, my calm was broken. I thought I could stand death, but not being stripped of my clothes. The woman Liz Pratt had pinned me tightly against the wall. All of a sudden she released her hold. The other woman turned and faced the door. The door opened and a man came in. It was Dr. Erle.



CHAPTER VIII

DECOY DUCKS



WHAT is the meaning of this?" said the doctor's voice briskly. He came quickly across the room, took in the position of things at a glance, laid his hand on my arm, pushed me into a corner, and stood with his back to me.

"Now, what are you doing?" he said, turning and flashing an angry glance at the two excited women.

"The biby," said Liz Pratt.

"Yes, I see the baby; but what are you doing to this lady?"

"We didn't know she wor a friend of yourn, doctor. She can go now; we don't touch no friends o' yourn."

The lady shall go when I have said something to you. You have both behaved shamefully. Who has killed the baby? What does this mean?"

The doctor went up to the table and touched the little face with a professional finger. He lifted the chin and looked steadily at the closed eyes.

"Her got knocked down in the street," began Liz Pratt, "and the lady——"

"What had the lady to do with it?"

"Her found the biby, and we brought it in here, and——"

"And you frightened the lady, and behaved—oh, I am utterly ashamed of you both. A lady comes, and you treat her, I won't say how. Ann Spicer, I was on my way to visit your son, but I cannot see him at present, the lady has to be taken home first. I'll come back later on if I can."

"We wouldn't hurt no friend o' yourn," replied Ann Spicer; "you air a good 'un, a bloomin' good 'un."

Her whole manner had changed, she was quite subservient, I saw a gleam of humanity in her fierce eyes.

"The lad has been calling out for you all day, doctor," she said; "he's a bit light in the 'ead. He's allers calling out for you. The lydy will be quite safe here if you go and look at him."

My courage had returned, and I crept out of my hiding-place behind Dr. Erle's broad back and touched him on the arm.

"Go," I said; "I am not at all afraid now."

He looked at me.

"Are you quite sure?" he said.

"They won't hurt me," I replied.

"That I won't," said Liz Pratt; "I didn't know as you was a friend to he; he's a good 'un; you're safe if you're his friend."

"But tell me the truth," said Dr. Erle, "have they taken anything from you—is your money all right?"

I did not reply.

Liz Pratt thrust her hand into the bosom of her dress. She took out my purse and laid it on the table.

"There's the swag," she said. "If you're his friend, your money's safe. Yes, you can stay here, lydy, and, Ann, you and the doctor can go and look at Tom."

"And you'll promise to keep straight, Liz?" said Dr. Erle; "you have gone quite far enough to-day." He looked steadily into the woman's face.

"It wor the drop of drink, doctor; when I have it in me, I don't rightly know what I'm doin'."

"But you'll keep straight now?"

"Yus, sir."

"Then you are all right," he said, turning to me. "I happen to know. These friends of mine are rough, but when they give their word, they keep it. I will be back as soon as ever I can."

Accompanied by Ann Spicer he left the room. Lizzie Pratt stood and gazed after him, then she went into another room, and presently came back with some gin and water in a glass.

"Tike it," she said, thrusting it into my face. "You're all of a shiver; you ain't used to us, but lor! our bark is worse nor our bite. We ain't never bad to them as we know is good to us. That's a good feller; he nursed me a month back when I war ill, he stayed up half the night, that he did; and Ann Spicer's Tom, he thinks more of the doctor than any one he ever met. It's the sort of wy the doctor hev—no 'airs about 'im, and yet he ain't, so to speak, 'umble. I've seen 'im look as 'aughty as you please, but there ain't no airs in 'im, and he's quite the gentleman. A man what knows 'ow to be 'aughty at the right moment, and yet is kind to the marrow in his bones; why, he's a real gentleman. I didn't know as you was a lydy what belonged to 'im."

You hurt me past bearing when you said my bibby was dead."

"I forgive you quite," I said; "I am sure you were stunned, and did not know what you were doing."

The woman's eyes twinkled, she turned away.

"You're a good 'un too," she said, after a pause, then she came up and looked at the child.

"Pore mite!" she said; "but it's as well for her, miss. I've had a sight of 'em, ten, and this be the tenth. I've buried most of 'em, but little Sal were peart—yes, peart is the word, but her is best away. This ain't no plice for bibbies. I'll bury her, and git the insurance money. I ensured her for five pounds. It'll pay the funeral and leave a bit over—but little Sal's best away, pore mite!"

She touched the child again. The ineffable peace of death was stealing over the tiny face. On the lips the smile had grown broader. I bent down and kissed the baby's lips.

"God bless you, little Sal," I said.

"Ay," said Liz Pratt, "He done that when He took her away. I see you're a real lydy. I'm sorry I give yer that blow—but there, my heart's kinder nor my 'and. I'm a rough 'un, and I'm going to the devil as fast as I can, but I'm sorry I struck up rough and acted rough to you. I'll be yer friend from this day out if you want me. Their ain't a torff in the place would lay a 'and on yer once you make friends with me. Why, here's the doctor back. How is Tom this evenin', doctor?"

"No worse and no better," replied Dr. Erle. "Good-bye, Lizzie. I am sorry about the baby. I must leave

you as this lady is very tired, and ought to be at home."

"You'll give a death certificate?" said Liz.

"I cannot do that. You had better come and see me in the morning; I must inform the police of the death."

Dr. Erle then asked one or two professional questions.

"Who saw the accident?" he said.

"I did," I answered.

"This lady is a doctor, and she can tell her own self," said Liz; "she picked up the baby the moment it fell."

I pointed to the cuts and bruises on the child's temple.

"Death was instantaneous," I said. "A heavy piece of iron fell from a barrow on the child's head, going through the skull and probably severing the middle cerebral artery and crushing the brain."

Dr. Erle looked at me in some surprise.

"Is it possible?" he said, his eyes lighting up. "I did not recognise you at first. Are you Miss Gifford—Dr. Gifford? Surely you and I were bracketed together on an important occasion."

"I am glad to have met you again," I answered. "I listened to you to-night."

"You look frightfully exhausted; come away at once. Let me see you home."

A moment or two later we found ourselves out of the Nile and walking down a more civilised street.

"How in the world did you get here?" said Dr. Erle. "Did you realise that you were in terrible danger? Those people would have thought no more of killing you than they would of killing a rat in a hole. At the present moment nearly every individual in that street is more or less of a devil."

I related my adventures, to which he listened quietly, with scarcely a comment.

"You acted very bravely," he said, when I had finished. "Of course the boy Jerry was sent to you as a decoy. You were respectably dressed, and the people thought that you would have money, or at least a watch and chain about your person. They meant to take all you had, and if you made any fuss, your life into the bargain. Thank God I was in time."

We had now reached the Maurice Hostel. Laura, in a state of despair, was looking out for me. Dr. Erle bade me a brief good-night, and the next moment I found myself surrounded by the kind Sisters, who were full of sympathy and commiseration. They gave me supper, and presently Laura and I found ourselves alone in the tiny chamber allotted to us.

Laura could scarcely sleep from excitement; but I was so exhausted, that the moment my head touched the pillow I fell into dreamless slumber, and when I awoke at an early hour the next morning, I could scarcely realise that I had gone through a *bonâ fide* adventure, and had been in imminent risk of losing my life.

"Well, I should think you have had enough of the dreadful submerged tenth to last you for the rest of your days," said Laura, as I quickly dressed.

I did not reply. I felt dazed and queer. I could not quite realise my own sensations. I wanted to be alone to think them out. The words I had heard Dr. Erle say the previous night were echoing again and again through my brain. The dead baby, Lizzie Pratt, Ann Spicer, Dr. Erle himself, were filling the entire of my horizon. I scarcely spoke as the Sisters gave me a comfortable

breakfast; and when Laura and I found ourselves in the tramcar, going swiftly up the City Road, I was still lost in earnest musing.

When we got to Queen Anne Street, an hour later than the time when I was supposed to see patients, I was met by George at the door. That worthy was in a state of the strongest excitement.

"Now this is something like," he said, rubbing his hands.

On the hall table I saw a slate, which had not been there when I left. On the slate were written the words—

"Doctor to call on Lady Simpson, 11 Eaton Place, as soon as possible. Urgent.

"Dr. Gifford to call at 20 Portland Place before three this afternoon."

"What does this mean?" I said, turning to George. "Who is Lady Simpson? and Portland Place? I certainly have no patients there."

"Oh, hush, doctor, hush!" said George. "I'll explain everything."

"If I must go, I must," I said. "But what does it mean?"

"Just come in here," said George. "You'll excuse me, miss," he said, looking at Laura, "but I must see the doctor alone. That slate has done wonders," he said, when he had shut Laura out. "The ladies who are waiting for you, doctor, in the consulting-room saw it, and one of them opened her eyes, I can tell you. 'Lady Simpson, Eaton Place, and wanted in a hurry in Portland Place!' It looks well, that it does."

"But what does it mean, George?"

"Decoy ducks," said George.

"George!"

"There ain't no such people," said George. "I put it on the slate on purpose. It looks well; and now you're not going to scold, for I always said I'd see you through, and things is brightening. And there's a card that I printed in great big letters, and placed on the most conspicuous place on the mantelpiece in the waiting-room. The card says that your terms is two guineas for a first visit, and one guinea ever after, and also that Dr. Gifford is only to be seen by appointment. Things has to be done by guile, and that decoy duck of a slate has done wonders."

"Well, never mind all that now," I said; "of course you know I don't approve, and somehow I approve less than ever to-day. But you say there is some one waiting in the consulting-room?"

George almost capered, and he certainly rubbed his hands in his excitement.

"Two ladies, no less," he said; "and look here, doctor, we'll get that nice young lady, Miss Barrington, to hact as a third patient. The ladies have been waiting for over half-an-hour. I told 'em you was out professionally employed, and I looked at the slate as I spoke. They looked too, and immediately they both said they'd wait. What done that but the slate, you tell me? I have been fussing in and out of the room more than once, and giving them opportunities to open up conversation, and when they took 'em, I let 'em see as you was worked to death, and they was more and more impressed each moment. Now if your friend, Miss Barrington, would go into the room too, and sit down

as if she were another patient, it would be fine. I'll go and call her."

George rushed into the hall. Laura came back, and George explained the situation.

"Do, miss," he said, looking persuasively at Laura; "you can't think what a boon it would be."

"I am sure I shall be only too happy," said Laura. "What am I to do? to go into the waiting-room? But what for?"

"To hact as a patient," said George; "to hact as an anxious patient, to put on the part and hact it. Now then, miss, this way."

Before poor Laura could utter another word the waiting-room door was flung wide open and she found herself inside. I heard George say in a loud theatrical whisper—

"The doctor has just come in, but won't be able to see you for over an hour, there's a many waiting for her to-day."

The door was softly closed and George stood beside me.

"There," he said, "I believe we has done it, conquered at last. Two of 'em waiting, and the decoy duck slate starin' them in the face when they comes out, and the young lady to h'act the part of a third. Now then, miss, you look pale and haggard; well, so much the better, it shows work. There's the traces of toil about you, Miss Gifford, and that's as it should be. You go and wash your 'ands and smooth your 'air, and then sit before your desk, and I'll show the first lady in. She's a Mrs. Tomlinson as far as I can remember, and mortal stout. You'll have to put her on the banting. You

don't mind me giving you a hint, seeing how long I has been mixed up in the profession?"

"Oh, certainly not, George," I answered.

My head ached, and I never felt less inclined to see patients; but the knowledge that I was really wanted at last was stimulating, and George's advice, his fussing and pottering round, further egged me on to rise to the occasion, and in less than five minutes I was waiting in the consulting-room and ready to see Mrs. Tomlinson.

I can scarcely describe the pompous and magnificent manner in which George ushered this worthy into the room. Mrs. Tomlinson was evidently more or less impressed.

"Dr. Gifford?" she said, looking at me somewhat nervously.

I requested her to seat herself, and George closed the door after her. I should not have been the least surprised if his ear had been applied to the keyhole in order to make certain to himself that I was catechising Mrs. Tomlinson in the true professional manner. But I was weak and tired, and not up to the usual mark. Mrs. Tomlinson seated herself with a certain puff and pant on the edge of the chair which I pointed out, looked me in the face, and said—

"Ah, Miss Gifford, I think you made a mistake when you went and unsexed yourself the way you did."

"What do you mean?" I asked, in some astonishment.

"It's the thought of women turning doctors," remarked the good lady, "which fairly riles me. If my poor mother could turn in her grave, she would at the mere thought. Not that I personally have anything to complain of.

What suits one generation don't suit another, that's all. Now, dear, I have come, not for myself, but for another."

"Then you are not a *bonâ fide* patient?" I answered.

"No, but a suppliant," she replied. She stared hard at me, unfastened her mantle and loosened her bonnet strings.

"It is a very hot day," she said, "and I seem to feel the heat more the older I grow; but that ain't the question, is it? I have come on behalf of my daughter. She's eighteen years of age, and by no means well. My husband has a great dislike to the medical profession, and he doesn't believe there is anything seriously wrong with Elsie; he says it's fancy, nothing more. I begged and implored of him to let her see a doctor, but he says No, he can cure her just as well himself. So he has been dosing her with Cure-All Tincture and Herriot's Pills, and other things of that sort, but the child only gets whiter and whiter, and thinner and thinner, and so weak and so low, that at last I could stand things no longer, and this morning I said to myself, 'Smuggle in a medical man I will, and then afterwards I may have courage to tell Ben.' Ben's his name, dear, and he is a right good fellow, but on the subject of doctors, a little touched in the head."

"Yes," I said, looking with interest at the poor woman, whose grief was evidently real.

"The child gets worse day by day," she continued, "she must see some one; her father doesn't know how to treat her, and something must be done without delay. I thought I would go to Harley Street, which, as you know, is a nest of doctors from end to end, but I hadn't courage to call at any door; and then I walked down

Queen Anne Street, and I saw your name—Dr. Mary Gifford—and I thought if there is a true woman's name it's Mary—Dr. Mary Gifford, she must have a kind heart, and I don't think I shall be afraid of her. If she were to come to the house, Ben would never suspect anything. I'll just call and ask her. I suppose, my dear, you're properly diplomed, or whatever they call it; you have passed your examinations, and are qualified?"

"Yes," I answered, "I am fully qualified to act as a medical woman. When shall I call to see your daughter?"

"The sooner the better; can you come home with me now?"

I certainly could, but then George would be furious.

"This is my hour for seeing patients," I said.

"Oh, that I can quite understand, and from what that valuable servant said, your time must be very full; but the case is really urgent, the child gets worse and worse. I have money of my own, and can afford to pay you well. It would be a real comfort to me if you would come when Ben is out."

"When does your husband return home?"

"About four in the afternoon. He has taken to dosing Elsie every three or four hours. He changes the medicine as often as three times a week. I'd like you to see her while he is away."

"Well, I will come to see your daughter to-day, but I cannot go on seeing her against your husband's wish. I will be at your house at three o'clock. Will that suit?"

"Thank you, my dear. You have a kind face and you look clever. If my poor mother were alive, she would

have no dislike to you personally, only to your profession. It is not the profession, my dear, for one of your sex."

"You can scarcely think that when you ask me to help to restore your daughter to health."

The good lady stood up.

"It sounds inconsistent," she said; "but nevertheless, I am driven into a corner. Ben, even if he saw you, would not suspect you to be a medical, and that's the main thing. And now, what is your fee, Miss Gifford?"

"Nothing at present; I have done nothing."

"But I have taken up your valuable time."

"I cannot charge you anything now. I will see your daughter at three to-day. Please give me your address."

Mrs. Tomlinson took a card-case out of her pocket, extracted a card with a very fat finger and thumb, laid it on the edge of my desk, bowed to me, and a moment later was shown out by the obsequious and happy George.



CHAPTER IX

ELSIE



It appeared to be my fate not to be able to come into direct communication with my patients. The other lady who wanted to see me had also not come on her own account. She was anxious to strike a bargain with me. She was the Principal of a small seminary for young ladies. Her establishment, as she was pleased to call it, was situated in Brompton. She thought it would be very much to the benefit of the girls if I would consent to act as the school physician. She had in her house twenty boarders. It would, she said, look extremely well to have a lady doctor. She disapproved of the male members of the profession, and said that for her part she welcomed the lady doctor as a long-felt want. Here she began to express herself quite frankly. She told me that in her opinion a great deal of mischief was done by introducing young and handsome male doctors into an establishment full of artless maidens. The mere presence of such a doctor encouraged that bane of the young woman of the present day, hysteria. Now, on the other hand, a lady doctor—here she broke off abruptly and looked into my face.

"The mothers will approve," she said. "To be able to mention in my prospectus that a lady doctor attends the school will add to the tone of the establishment—a consultant, too, from Queen Anne Street. Yes, the prospectus will look well, very well, with your name on it, Dr. Gifford. Now, think what a splendid advertisement this will be for you. Do you consent to my plan? Of course for really serious cases, such as epidemics, should such visit the house, I must have a doctor who lives nearer the premises, also one who has had some experience, for I doubt not from your very juvenile appearance you have not been long registered."

"I took my M.B. nearly a year ago," I replied, "and my experience is—nil."

"Indeed!" She glanced at me anxiously. "Nevertheless," she continued, "your name will read very well on the prospectus. You will not object?"

"I should be quite willing to attend your school at a reasonable fee," I replied, "but as to my name on the prospectus, I am not at all prepared to say that I should care to have it placed there; however, I will think that over. What fee do you intend to offer me?"

Miss Lawson hummed and hawed, she unbuttoned her glove and half drew it off, then thinking better of it pulled it on again; she looked me in the face and then looked away.

"I should be willing to give you a retaining fee of ten guineas a year," she said; "will that satisfy you?"

"I should be pleased to call at the school occasionally for that fee," I answered.

"Oh, but that will not do at all," she said; "you don't understand. I want you to visit us in order to overhaul

the pupils at least once a week. Friday is the day that will suit me best, Friday at four in the afternoon. It will be a source of the deepest satisfaction to the mothers when they understand that each girl undergoes weekly the strict supervision of the well-known lady doctor, Mary Gifford, M.B."

"In that case I must ask higher terms," I said.

Miss Lawson flushed angrily, and then she began to haggle. She was well up in the art of haggling, and her endeavours to beat me down did her powers of manœuvring the highest credit; nevertheless I was firm. In the end she arranged to pay me five guineas a term for my professional services. I was to visit her select seminary for young ladies every Friday at four, and was then to see all the pupils.

"Your report as to the excellent health and sanitation of the place, as to the marked change for the better in the health of the pupils, will be added to my own report each term," she said. "Perhaps I may also give you a gentle hint that you will not be the loser if you mention my school when you have opportunity to outsiders. Thus you will add to my connection, and——"

I rose. Miss Lawson's manner did not please me, her words pleased me still less. I was hungry for patients, or I must have declined the post she offered on the spot. I had to suppress all emotion, however, or I might have said something which I would have repented of the next moment.

"I shall expect you to call at the school on Friday afternoon next," she said, rising. Having made her final arrangements she went out.

Laura and George now immediately joined me.

"I hope, doctor," said the latter, in a breathless voice full of the most eager anticipation, "that you charged them two patients a couple of guineas each. I have been a-calculating that you would turn over four guineas by this morning's work, miss. Two guineas is the very lowest a consultant of Queen Anne Street ought to take for a first visit, and so I have advertised on the card in the waiting-room."

The poor fellow's distress when he heard that I had received no golden coins for my morning's advice was piteous to behold.

"Dear, dear," he said, "this is really terrible." He looked from me to Laura.

"I declare, miss," he continued, now addressing the latter, "I 'opes when you take up the medical profession that you'll have more worldly wisdom than Dr. Gifford, for it's quite terrible the way she neglects her chances."

Laura went away, and in the afternoon of that same day I found myself at Brixton. The Tomlinsons lived in Fellow's Square. The house was a large and pretentious one. I arrived punctually to the hour, and was shown by a pompous-looking footman into a drawing-room which bore the impression of *nouveaux riches* all over it. A moment later Mrs. Tomlinson waddled in.

"Ah! my dear," she cried, "so good of you to come. I have told Elsie; she is upstairs—hasn't been down for over a week. Two Herriot's Pills she was obliged to swallow with her dinner, and has been in agonies of indigestion ever since. She has now taken ten bottles of Cure-All Tincture without the slightest result, and

Gilbert's Golden Globules is her father's last idea. But come, you will see her for yourself."

Mrs. Tomlinson opened the door and led me from the room. We went up some spacious stairs thickly carpeted with Axminster, down a passage which was close with heavy furniture and very thick carpets, and into a room which bore the same impression of being over-furnished and sadly destitute of air. It was a hot afternoon, but there was a fire in the grate; every window was carefully shut, and a heavy curtain shaded the door. In addition a screen half surrounded an easy-chair in which the patient lay.

"This is Dr. Gifford, dear," said Mrs. Tomlinson, going up and whispering to her daughter. "Open your eyes, Elsie love; this is the doctor I have got in unbeknown to papa. We won't tell papa anything about it; we'll have our own little secret, won't we, lovey? Open your eyes, dear; rouse yourself a bit."

"I feel so sick, mother," said the poor girl, "and the light hurts me."

The mother drew the screen a little more forward.

"There, darling, you are almost in the dark now," she said. "Here, Dr. Gifford, is a seat for you. Dr. Gifford is a lady doctor, Elsie, and pitiful, I am sure, by the look of her face. You tell her all about your aches and pains, and she will soon have you on your feet again."

"When will father be back, mother?" asked the girl.

"Not for an hour at the very least, so we can be quite comfortable, lovey. Sit here, won't you, Dr. Gifford? Elsie dear, hold out you hand to the doctor. The pulse is always taken the first thing, and then the tongue put out for examination, and I suppose, doctor, you have

got one of those dreadful little thermometers about your person? The mere look of them makes me shudder—they seem to me to be a fatal source of contracting disease.”

“The clinical thermometer!” I exclaimed; “why do you think that?”

“And why should not I think it? It is only common-sense. A doctor puts one of those horrid little instruments into the mouth of a patient suffering from diphtheria, and then he puts the same thing into the mouth of another patient with a nervous disease, and what can be more likely to follow than that the nervous patient gets the diphtheria?”

“Very well argued,” I answered; “and if a doctor were to be so careless and so unworthy of his profession, the direst accidents might occur. But I must really explain for the credit of the medical world, a member of which I am, that we do take a little care. We wash the thermometer in a disinfectant in every case. Now, please, may I be alone with the patient?”

“Alone, Dr. Gifford! You surely don’t mean the girl’s own mother to leave her? Elsie, love, you don’t want your mother to go out of the room?”

“I should be very glad if you would go, mother, for you talk so much,” said the girl.

Mrs. Tomlinson flushed a kind of purple, and then went slowly away as far as the bay window.

“Farther than here I refuse to budge,” she said. “Have not I to look out to see if papa is coming home in his brougham, and in that case, have not I got to smuggle Dr. Gifford out of the way. Now please, doctor, begin; I am all in a twitter, I can tell you, to

have you out of the house ; I'll turn my back so you can ask the most delicate questions. Mother won't interfere, Elsie ; you can talk as free as if I were a mile away."

Making the best of a bad job I turned to Elsie. The first thing necessary to do was to draw back the screen in order to examine the pallid and anæmic face of the poor child. I asked her several questions. At first she seemed almost incapable of replying to them ; but I gradually drew her out, and she began to detail some of her symptoms. I sounded her heart and tapped at her lungs. I noticed how short her breath was, how the colour came and went in her cheeks, how thoroughly anæmic she was in every respect. To my relief I could find no absolute disease, although, if strong measures were not immediately taken, disease must supervene on such extreme weakness.

My examination being over I went across the room to where Mrs. Tomlinson was standing.

"I have examined your daughter," I said ; "I should like to speak to you in another room."

"Ay, ay," she answered, "that's right and proper. We never tell the patient the worst—do we? Now, Elsie love—why, mercy me! you have taken away the screen, doctor ; the child will be screaming with the pain in her eyes to-night."

"Her eyes are weak from want of light ; but you can arrange the screen as you like for the present. I must see you in another room."

Mrs. Tomlinson led the way into her own boudoir. Her boudoir was furnished in blue plush, with a crimson carpet. The windows were shut. In this

room too a huge fire was burning. I quite panted as I entered it.

"Feel a bit faint?" she said. "Ah! I expect you have been and done it. Sit you down here, and you shall have your tea. I'll ring the bell and Adolphus shall bring it."

She pressed the electric bell by the side of the fireplace, and the footman Adolphus appeared.

"Tea, Dolph," said Mrs. Tomlinson, "and as quickly as possible. Tell cook to send up plenty of well-buttered cakes and cream."

Not a muscle on the man's grave face moved. He left the room, and Mrs. Tomlinson seated herself by my side.

"I'm rather bothered of late," she said, "and Dolph is the cause. It's his name I can't handle. Think of any woman in a mortal hurry, as I am often in, having to say Adolphus; my tongue won't curl round it. Now, my dear, I don't mind confiding in you, for though you are a doctor, you have a nice, sympathetic sort of face. When I look at you, Dr. Gifford, I forget that you are a member of the medical world, and just think that you are a nice young girl, the sort that ought to be petted and fussed over, the sort that Elsie ought to be if she was in her normal health, poor child. But there, there—I was always a great one to wander. This is what I want to say. When I was young and married Ben we lived in a small house away citywards, and I did most of the work myself; but since he has taken up the iron trade and invented that new bicycle lamp, he has got so monstrously rich, that nothing will please him but this big house; and we had to rise to a footman, and the

man who seemed to fit the post was named Adolphus. I don't say for a moment that he doesn't do his work splendidly, and he gives a great air to the establishment, but I can't fashion Adolphus round my tongue, that's the long and short of it, so I call him Dolph. It's a queer name for a footman, isn't it, my dear?"

"Very," I answered, with difficulty restraining a smile; "but now I want to talk to you about my little patient."

"Yes, yes, dear, you tell me all about Elsie. What is to be done with her?"

I briefly described the case. The girl was suffering from anæmia, but more than all else her complaint was due to having nothing to interest her in life. The whole régime of her young existence must be altered immediately. She must have abundance of fresh air, of exercise, of nourishing food.

"She was as bonny a girl as you could see when she was at school," said Mrs. Tomlinson. "It's since her schooldays are over that she's begun to fret and worry, and take no interest in any mortal thing; and Ben (for she's the apple of his eye, and I won't deny it) got so frightened about her, that he began to dose her with all those quack medicines. There! I hear his step in the passage; it's Ben, as sure as fate. Dr. Gifford, you'll forgive me if I take you into my bedroom and lock the door. I'll bring you in a cup of tea in a moment; but let Ben know that you are here, I daren't."

"But I dare," I said, colouring. "Mrs. Tomlinson, you must be brave. I did not refuse your request this morning to come and see your daughter, but now I

must come to a stand. I cannot take charge of this case without your husband knowing the truth. I must see him, and tell him the state your child is in."

"You must see my husband? You must see Ben?"

"Certainly, or I cannot undertake your daughter's case."

"Oh!" cried the poor woman, the tears starting to her eyes, "I did think I had come across a congenial feminine creature, who would have some sympathy for a distracted mother; but there! one is doomed to be disappointed in life. You mean to say that you are going to betray me?"

"Do have courage, Mrs. Tomlinson," I answered. "Your husband cannot be angry. If you are afraid, let me see him; let me explain the position."

"Would you dare?" she asked, looking at me with sudden admiration.

"Dare!" I answered; "of course I should dare; and he cannot possibly be angry when he knows the truth. I will almost guarantee that he won't say a word of blame to you. For instance, Herriot's Pills and Dr. Gilbert's Golden Globules and Johnson's Tincture must all be stopped immediately. Your daughter must begin a completely new course of treatment, and until her father knows that she is undergoing that treatment, how can I save her?"

"Save her!" said Mrs. Tomlinson; "but you didn't say she was in danger?"

"I did not, because at the present moment she has scarcely reached that point; but let things go on as they are now doing for another week, and she will in all probability be in the early stage of consumption."

"Oh, my word!" said the poor woman, "and that is what my mother died of. The mere mention of the name is enough to terrify Ben into a fit. Well, I am in a strait. I don't know what is to be done. I declare I'm on the horns of a dilemma. Is that you, Dolph, outside, with the tea? Oh, I forgot I had locked the door. Wait a minute, and I'll let you in. Whatever happens, doctor, I suppose you'd like your tea?"

Mrs. Tomlinson unlocked the door, threw it open, and admitted Dolph.

"Come in; quick, for Heaven's sake!" she cried. "Put the tray on that table. Was that your master's step I heard in the passage?"

"Yes, ma'am; the master returned about ten minutes ago. He's in Miss Elsie's room, ma'am."

"You remember what I said to you this morning, Dolph," said his mistress; "you didn't let out anything?"

"No, ma'am, I didn't say anything."

The man withdrew, closing the door after him.

"Dolph's a good fellow, very," said Mrs. Tomlinson. She took out her handkerchief and wiped the moisture from her brow. "Now then, sit down and enjoy your tea. If Ben's with Elsie, he'll be safe to stay with her for a few minutes, and I'll lock this door to make all things safe. The cake is home-made, and I can vouch for its being delicious. How much cream do you like in your tea, dear?"

She handed me a cup, flavoured according to my wishes, and I drank it slowly.

"Wouldn't you go now, dear, and come back again to-morrow? I might have the courage——"

"You had better let me get it over now," I said. "Do, please, take my advice. I assure you, I am full of sympathy for you; I am most anxious to benefit your daughter. There is not an hour to lose in putting her on the right course, and she cannot derive any benefit from my treatment until her mind is at rest. Ask your husband to come to me. Simply say that there is a Miss Gifford in your boudoir who wishes to see him."

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Mrs. Tomlinson. "Have I the courage, or have I not? My heart goes pitapat. Oh dear, oh dear! a little thing upsets me, and I suffer so from the palpitations. I was thin and light and wiry while Ben was poor. Riches are anything but an unmixed blessing, and that I can assure you. Ben used not to be masterful, but now he is. Dear, dear! well, I suppose I must."

She left the room very unwillingly. I heard her footsteps lingering along the thickly-carpeted passage. I heard the door of the sick girl's chamber being opened. A moment or two later a brisk step was heard approaching; there was determination in it. I felt a sense of relief.

"I believe," I said to myself, "that I shall manage her dear Ben better than I do Mrs. Tomlinson herself."

The door of the boudoir was swung open, and Mr. Tomlinson appeared.

He was a very thin man, a marked contrast to his wife. His long face ended with a peaked beard; his forehead was high, narrow, and inclined to baldness; his scanty hair was grey, but must have been red in his youth. He bowed to me somewhat awkwardly and motioned me to a chair.

"The wife says you wish to see me, Miss Gifford. I am particularly engaged just now after a hard day's work. I was with my daughter, who I regret to say——"

But I interrupted him.

"I had better tell you the truth at once, Mr. Tomlinson. Please hear me out before you blame anybody. I am a doctor, this is my card." I took it out of my pocket and handed it to him. He glanced at it in astonishment. Then he looked at me as if he would read me through. After a long pause he said—

"God bless my soul! I don't understand what this means. You a doctor? Why, you are only a girl, a slip of a lass. Do you mean to tell me that you attend people who are sick?"

"Certainly," I replied.

"And you have come here—what have you come here for?"

"To see your daughter."

"To see Elsie—are you a friend of hers?"

"I never heard of her until to-day. I have come to attend her medically."

"Who asked you to come, pray?"

"Your wife."

"Susan!—my wife asked you to come here to see my girl Elsie! Am I dreaming?"

He put up his hand as if he would sweep away some imaginary hair from his forehead, his lips shook, he walked over and stood on the hearthrug.

"This room is confoundedly hot," he said; "I wish to goodness Susannah was not so afraid of air. Do you mind if I open this window, miss—doctor, I mean?"

"I should approve of it," I said; "I myself am quite exhausted with the heat of the room."

"Ah, that's better," he said. "And so you're a woman doctor? I have heard there were such creatures, but to be frank with you, you are the very first I have ever come across."

"Well," I answered somewhat boldly, "do you see anything the matter with me? Do I seem to have less brains or less intelligence than the ordinary woman?"

"Oh, you don't come over me with your chaff," he replied; "I'm not the one to be gulled, I can tell you. But do you mind telling me again what you have come for? Is Susan herself ill, or is it one of the servants?"

"You know why I came," I answered sternly; "I have come here at your wife's request to see your daughter. I am glad she had the courage to send for me. She has told me you do not approve of doctors."

"Nor do I—I hate the whole lot. I could tell you stories about the profession. Why, one-half of them are arrant humbugs, neither more nor less, and the other half would think as little of poisoning you as they would of eating their dinner. That's what the medical profession is, made up of rogues and humbugs. You, a girl, take up with medicine; fah! it is sickening. But see here, miss or doctor, or whatever you call yourself, you came to this house under false pretences, and out you go."

"I go out after you have heard a plain truth."

"Eh, what's that?"

With all his bluff I could see that the man was terribly nervous.

"What may the plain truth be?" he repeated.

"Your daughter is in a condition which will be one of danger unless immediate steps are taken for her relief."

"What is it you're saying—my daughter Elsie in danger?"

"I repeat what I said just now. If immediate steps are not taken for her recovery, the seeds of consumption now dormant within her will spring into life. In that case she will be dead in three months."

"Oh my GOD! do you know what you're saying, young woman?"

"Perfectly well. I have studied the symptoms. The seeds of consumption are there; they are still dormant, but they won't be dormant long; it is possible to save her."

The man had turned ashy-white when I began to speak; before I had finished he had flung himself into the nearest chair, his head fell forward on his breast. After a time he looked up again.

"You have given me a blow, Dr. Gifford," he said, "and I am ashamed to say I could not stand up to it the first minute. If there's a thing I dread in all the world it's consumption, and Elsie is the only child I have. I have toiled in order to leave her well off, to give her a good time by-and-by, and you—you, a stranger, have crept into my house to tell me that she is doomed."

"I have not crept into your house," I answered; "I have come at your wife's request, and your daughter is not doomed, that is, if you will allow her to be saved. The treatment to which she has been subjected must be changed immediately."

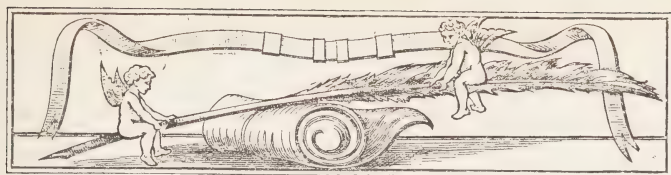
"But what ails it?" said the man; "Johnson's Tincture has cured thousands; and if that should fail, what about Herriot's Pills? and if they too fail, what have you to say against Dr. Gilbert's Golden Globules? You can't have the cheek to say there's nothing in any of 'em. Why, I tell you there's more in them than in all the drugs of your boasted Pharmacopœia."

"Very well," I answered, "you must go your own way. I have told you the truth; it is for you to believe it or not, as you please. You say you dislike lady doctors—doubtless you dislike them more than the men of the profession. There are excellent men doctors to be found anywhere near London; ask one of them to come here if you do not believe me, or let me see one of them in consultation, and if I am wrong with regard to your daughter, then, Mr. Tomlinson, I will own myself defeated; but if I am right—will you let your child die when she can be saved?"

He made no reply. I looked at him, then I rose and went to the door.

"I have told you the truth," I repeated. "If you take my advice, or the advice of any other doctor, be it man or woman, in all probability your child will be strong and well in less than six months. It is for you to choose."

Still he did not answer. He sat with lowering brows, his hands thrust into his pockets. I left him, crossed the passage slowly, and went downstairs. I let myself out of the house.



CHAPTER X

THE OLD TREATMENT



NO one heard me go. The footman Adolphus was nowhere visible. As I stood on the steps outside that pretentious, disagreeable mansion, I trembled from head to foot. Had I done right in leaving so suddenly? I felt that I had. I felt also that in this hour of seeming defeat, victory was really mine. Without doubt Mr. Tomlinson would come to see me. My words would sink all the more deeply into his brain because I had taken the initiative, had chosen to conclude that he would have nothing more to do with me, and had left him. All the same I was considerably shaken. I was still new to my work, and the face of the girl, her languid eyes, her burning lips, the feeble entreaty in that glance which, if nothing was done, would soon, as there was a God above, be a dying glance, haunted me in spite of myself.

I returned to Queen Anne Street to find that I had received a summons to attend the coroner's inquest of the baby who had died in the Nile. I was to be at the Nile at ten o'clock on the following morning. The order to attend was accompanied by a very kind

note from Dr. Erle. He asked me to call at his house, and said that he would take me to the house where the inquest was to be.

I went out to a restaurant for dinner, and came back with a bad headache. I had not been ten minutes in the house before I heard a cab drive up to the door and stop. The electric bell sounded through the house. George went to open the door—a man's voice was heard in the hall. The next instant Mr. Tomlinson was admitted into my consulting-room. I was seated at my desk busily taking notes from an important article in the *Lancet*. I looked up when he came in. His thin face looked thinner and longer than ever, his figure more narrow. He came up to me, bent down, looked hard into my face, and said—

“You must come back with me this minute.”

“Indeed,” I answered; “why?”

“You forgive me of course—but whether you forgive me or not, that is neither here nor there. You are a doctor, you have taken it upon you to cure human beings, to drag them back from the grave, and there is a summons for you. You are due at Miletia House, Fellow's Square, Brixton, as soon as ever you can get there. We will drive out there in my hansom. Put on your hat and let's be off.”

The moment the man had done speaking he sank down into the nearest chair, rested both hands upon its arms, and stared hard at me.

“You are coming?” he said; “you are coming?”

“Yes, of course, I will come, Mr. Tomlinson,” I answered.

“That's a good creature,” he said with a gasp. “Thank the Almighty!”

I left him there and then, went into my small bedroom, put on my hat and jacket, and taking up my little Burroughs & Wellcome's medicine-chest, returned.

"I am ready now," I said.

George was standing in the hall. He stood at attention, his eyes glanced from me to Mr. Tomlinson. There was intense approval, and at the same time warning, in his glance. His lips seemed to say—

"Now, for goodness' sake, don't give yourself away."

"I may not be back to-night, George," I said.

"In that case, doctor," he replied, "I will let the patients know, when they come in the morning, that they must wait until they see you. There are a good many who have appointments for to-morrow, don't you forget that, doctor."

I shook my head at George. It was dreadful of him to tell untruths in such a wholesale manner, but I was sorry enough for him not to betray him, and I doubt if Mr. Tomlinson heard.

"Now, you get back to Miletia House, Fellow's Square, Brixton, as fast as ever your horse can do the distance, my man, and you'll have a sovereign for your pains," he said to the driver. He flung himself hastily into the seat by my side, and we started off.

"Cold?" he asked, as we found ourselves rattling away in the direction of Westminster Bridge.

"Not in the least," I answered.

"We'll have the glass down if you wish it; you have only to say. I don't want to plant the seeds of consumption in *you* by this night's drive."

"I am all right," I replied. "I like plenty of air."

"And so do I for that matter. The wife's the other way—afraid of a draught, never opens the windows except with the door shut. Shut 'em always when anybody comes into the room. I'm fairly smothered since we got those new carpets. Tell me now, Dr. Gifford, do you approve of Axminster carpets?"

"Oh, they're all right," I replied; "as good as any other."

"As good as any other? They're three times the money of any other, unless you mean the best Turkey. We have furnished Miletia Mansion from attic to cellar regardless of expense—regardless of expense, mind you—and why do you think we have done it?"

"I cannot say," I answered.

"For the sake of the child, little Elsie, bless her! Dr. Gifford, you've got to save Elsie."

"Do you really mean," I asked suddenly, "to put the case into my hands?"

"Ay, I mean it."

"But I thought you hated the profession?"

"Don't you bring my words up to me now. Don't talk any more to me, either, while we are driving to Brixton. I have had a blow, and you—you gave it to me."

"But you have used some strong words against the profession, which I think the noblest in the world," I answered. "Are you prepared to apologise?"

"Oh, curse it, yes," he replied.

"Those are just the words I do not want you to use against the medical profession."

"I never will again if you save her life. It will be, 'Bless you and all that you belong to for all the rest of your days if you only save her life.'"

"God helping me, I will save her life," I replied with fervour.

"There's my hand on my part of the bargain," said Mr. Tomlinson. He held out his thin hand, and wrung mine, then he crouched back into the extreme recess of the hansom, and seemed to shrink into himself. I did not say another word until we reached Miletia Mansion. The solemn footman was waiting for us on the steps. "Stand out of the way, Adolphus, and let the lady in," said Mr. Tomlinson. "Come along at once, Dr. Gifford. Has the room I ordered been prepared for the lady, Adolphus?"

"Yes, sir," answered the man.

"Then come upstairs with me, doctor."

"But where are you taking me?" I asked.

"To Elsie, of course."

"I must speak to you for a moment alone. I cannot enter the sick-room without being armed at all points. What is the reason of this sudden change?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake don't trifle with me," said the man. "Are not moments precious? But, there! if you must, you must."

He flung open the door of a small room, more simply furnished than the rest of the house.

"My private study," he said; "carpet a bit worn—fond of old carpet; it saw me in my early days, when I was poor and had not a care in the world, and Elsie was a bright-eyed little tot, with rosy cheeks. God help me! the look on her face haunts me, that it does."

"Now tell me why you changed your mind."

"Why I changed my mind? Dr. Gifford, your

words took it out of me. It was as if a veil was torn from my eyes. If you'll believe me, I could have sworn by Johnson's Tincture and Dr. Gilbert's Golden Globules and Herriot's Pills. Didn't I try them myself? and Johnson's Tincture—why, it did me no end of good; and I hated doctors—I thought 'em humbugs, and that's the truth. But when you spoke, although I was as rude as could be, I believed you somehow all the time, and I was fairly stunned. I looked up, meaning to ask you to stay, and to give you a bit of an apology—although it goes hard with a man to have to apologise to a slip of a girl—but you had gone, taken the bit between your teeth and bolted. Shabby of you, you know; hard on a man more than double your age. And then the wife come in, and she burst out crying. She's given to hysterics, is the wife; I couldn't keep her going at all if it wasn't for Herriot's Pills. She cried and cried, and said that I had Elsie's death at my door, and that her mother died of consumption; and then she sat down and began to describe the beastly thing—the cough, and the fever, and the perspiration—ugh! it was horrid. And to get away from her I went into the child's room, and there was Elsie peering out at me from behind her screen, and saying—

“‘Father, do you know—have they told you—are you angry? Father, you'll let her help me, you'll let her save me? Oh, I do like her so much—so much; I want her back—I want her back.’

“And then I looked into my darling's face, and my heart sank lower and lower, and I seemed to read the truth of your words in letters of fire, and I knew at

last that Johnson's Tincture and all the rest of the humbugging stuffs were not doing her one scrap of good, and then I said to her, 'Yes, Elsie, Dr. Gifford shall come back.' And she smiled at me, her face all radiant, and lay back on her sofa, and then all of a sudden, before I could utter a word, she gave a cry, and she fainted sheer off before my eyes. God in heaven! I thought she was dead. I rushed for the wife, and the wife came in, and we poured brandy down her throat; we did all we could, and she revived, but it was only to groan out—

"I want Dr. Gifford; I want that nice lady, Dr. Gifford."

"So then I made off for you, like an arrow from a bow, and here we are back again; and now, for goodness' sake, don't keep me talking any longer, but come to the child and save her."

"You will let me do exactly what I think right?" I said.

"Anything, anything; and to the half of what I possess you shall have, only save Elsie."

"Then it is all right," I said, "and I am full of hope."

I went upstairs, Mr. Tomlinson leading the way. He opened the door of the overheated and stifling bedroom. Mrs. Tomlinson was seated by the bedside. Elsie had been removed from her couch close to the fire, and was lying in a bed which was placed in a sheltered alcove; curtains surrounded it, and shut away the little air the room possessed. There were a couple of blankets on the bed, and a thick, soft eider-down. The blinds were drawn down at the windows; there

was a night-light in one corner of the room; the fire had been freshly built up, and was blazing brightly.

"Here we are," said Mr. Tomlinson, adopting a cheerful voice the moment he got into the room.

"Hush! hush!" said Mrs. Tomlinson, "she cannot bear the least sound; she's been complaining so bitter of her 'ead; and her heyes, ever since the doctor was so inconsiderate as to let the light in, have been paining her awful."

"Oh, we'll soon change all that," I said. "Please, Mrs. Tomlinson, let me get close to the patient. How are you, Elsie, this evening?"

"I feel very ill indeed," said Elsie, in a low, tremulous voice.

"You will be better soon. You are hot, are you not?"

"Oh yes, burning; but a short time ago I was bathed in perspiration."

"Consumptive," murmured Mrs. Tomlinson, hissing the word out in a whisper. "I know the symptoms; my mother had those sweats every night."

"You are in a perspiration, and also feverish, because this room is just three times too hot," I said. "Is there a thermometer anywhere about?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, don't let in the night air," said Mrs. Tomlinson.

Mr. Tomlinson also glanced at me with disapproval in his eyes.

I saw at once that I must take the bull by the horns. I motioned therefore to the parents to follow me on to the landing. When I got them both outside, Mrs. Tomlinson, scarlet in the face, panting, puffing, and bathed

herself with the dews of perspiration, Mr. Tomlinson looking thinner and whiter, and more ghastly than ever, I spoke with determination.

"Am I to have the charge of this case, or am I not?" I asked.

"Why, of course," said Mr. Tomlinson. "My dear," he said, turning to his wife, "I have given in utterly—yes, Susannah, utterly. We could not manage the child; she has been sinking and sinking, and now Dr. Gifford has got her. Dr. Gifford must cure her in her own way."

"Of course, and whose wish is that if it isn't mine?" said Mrs. Tomlinson.

"Then, as you both wish it, you must not interfere with me when I make a suggestion in the sick-room," I said.

"To be sure not; mum's the word," said Mrs. Tomlinson.

"Whatever you wish, doctor, is to *be*," said Mr. Tomlinson, making an obsequious bow, and glancing at me with terrified and yet admiring eyes.

"You can, of course, both come back to the room if you like," I said, "although I would rather have the child to myself."

"We will come back," said Mrs. Tomlinson; "we could not really trust her, our only child, to a total stranger, and she would feel the loneliness so terribly. We must come back."

"You shall if you will allow me to act and not interfere. I must at once completely alter the atmosphere of the room. Where is the thermometer I asked for?"

Mrs. Tomlinson owned that she did not keep one in

the house. Mr. Tomlinson asked where he could obtain one.

I told him to go to the nearest chemist's and to bring back a shilling thermometer without delay, also to go on to the fishmonger's and fetch some ice. He looked at me with astonishment, then suddenly plucking up heart he dashed down the passage. I re-entered the sick-room.

"Now, Elsie," I said, "your father and mother wish me to help you to get well again."

"Oh, I shall never be well again," said the poor girl.

"Yes, you will, if you'll do what I tell you. To begin, I am going to take off this eider-down."

"I shall shiver with cold."

"On the contrary, you will be less feverish, and altogether more comfortable. Mrs. Tomlinson, these heavy curtains must be removed from the bed; but stay, I can put them back for to-night. To-morrow there must be a complete change in all Elsie's surroundings."

I pushed back the curtains, removed the eider-down, and straightened the heavy blankets. It would not do to make too great a change too suddenly. I then drew up the blinds, and opened the windows wide. A breath of sweet summer air came into the heated room. Elsie, who had been lying with her eyes closed, opened them.

"That is nice, but isn't it—isn't it dangerous?" she said.

"You have not to think whether it is dangerous or not," I answered; "you have just quietly to submit to what I do for you."

I then asked for hot water, poured some toilet vinegar into it, and washed the child's face and hands. I combed back her thick hair, and coiled it on the top of her head in such a way that it should not worry her.

When Mr. Tomlinson came back with the thermometer he was amazed at the change in the room.

"Bless me!" he said, "is this safe?"

"Remember your compact," I whispered to him.

"Mum's the word—mum's the word," said Mrs. Tomlinson, nudging him. "She has undertaken it," she added in a hoarse whisper, "and if she kills Elsie we'll have her up for murder; but I suppose it is all right. Anyhow, we've given in, and we have got to submit." She turned her back, uttering feeble sighs.

"Well, I must say," remarked Mr. Tomlinson, plucking up courage, "that the change in the atmosphere of the room is most refreshing. Do you approve of such a big fire, Dr. Gifford?"

The fire must die out gradually," I said. "At this time of year Elsie does not require a fire; but we will see about that presently. Now, Elsie," I continued, opening my medicine chest, "I am going to give you a little medicine, which I hope will produce a quiet sleep." I poured some into a glass, and held it to her lips. She drank it off. She was now lying calm and still on her back. All the anxious expression had left her face; it was full of absolute trust, which was infinitely touching.

"Have you any champagne in the house?" I asked, turning to Mr. Tomlinson.

"The best—the best," he cried, puffing himself out pompously; "the very best and driest brand."

"Then let me have a small bottle; and where is the ice I ordered? I intend to give the child iced champagne at intervals during the night. In the morning she will be ready to undergo the new treatment which I mean to subject her to."



CHAPTER XI

THE NEW TREATMENT



SAT up with Elsie that night. Mrs. Tomlinson refused to leave the room, but after much persuasion she was induced to lie down on the sofa. There she immediately dropped into a profound sleep, snoring loudly as she did so.

Notwithstanding the small dose of bromide which I had given her, Elsie had a bad night; she was restless, and her temperature was high; but I kept up her strength with the iced champagne, and towards morning she dropped into a light and refreshing slumber. When I saw that this was the case I went over to Mrs. Tomlinson, and, after a little persuasion, induced her to retire to her own room. I then sat down by Elsie, and waited results. Soon after six o'clock she awoke, uttered a faint sigh, looked at me, remembered the change which had taken place on the previous night, and owned that she felt rested.

"I had a wonderful sleep and a wonderful dream," she said.

"Do not talk about them now, dear," I answered.

"But I should so like to tell you my dream. I

thought an angel came and led me away from all the terrible misery and the closeness and the want of air into a strong, healthy place; and when I looked into the face of the angel she wore your face, Dr. Gifford. Can it be possible that it is really meant that you shall save me?"

"Why, my dear child," I answered, in as light and cheerful a voice as I could assume, "you are not going to die. Please dismiss that idea from your head immediately. You are going to get better, much better."

"But father and mother have looked so solemn and so—so terrified."

"It was necessary for me to speak a little strongly to them, in order to induce them to consent to my trying the treatment which alone can benefit you. Now, here is a cup of tea which I have made for you myself. Let me raise you a little in bed."

"I am sure I am much too weak to sit up," she replied.

"Not a bit of it; it is such a lovely morning, and the window is wide open. Don't you hear the birds singing in the trees?"

"Oh yes," she answered, with a wan little smile; "they do sound pretty, don't they?"

"Of course they do. I am going to draw up the blinds presently, and you will see the trees; there are several trees in this old-fashioned square; you can see them nicely from your window."

"But my eyes, they hurt me so terribly."

"They are weak from want of light and want of air, but the green of the trees will refresh them."

"Where is mother?" said Elsie, as she submitted to

having a couple of pillows put under her head, and took her cup of tea in her own terribly wasted hand.

"I have got her to go to her bedroom for a couple of hours ; she is thoroughly tired ; and now, while she is away, I am going to alter this room."

"To alter it ?" said Elsie, with the ghost of a smile.

"Yes, to make it more comfortable and bright, and less like an invalid's room. You don't want to think of yourself as an invalid, Elsie ?"

"Oh, I hate it," she replied. "You don't know how I have struggled against it, doctor ; but it came on, oh so gradually and so surely, just like a heavy, wet fog, blotting out the sunshine and taking away my strength, taking away my energy ; I seem to have no interest left in life."

"Oh, I know all about that," I answered.

"You, Dr. Gifford ?"

"Yes. I have passed through the stage—most girls do, I think—only I had courage to resist it, and to start well, to start bravely on my own account."

"Oh, you do interest me so wonderfully. It is so very kind of a great doctor like you to come to see a poor little girl with one foot in the grave."

"It is not a bit kind of me to come, it is my duty ; but if you talk again of having one foot in the grave I shall be seriously angry. Is that tea nice ?"

"I am not at all hungry, but it is refreshing."

"Now drink your tea, and eat your biscuit."

"I cannot eat."

"You are to eat that biscuit whether you are hungry or not. We have a great deal to do, you and I, before your mother and father come in."

"What is the hour?" asked Elsie, with a smile.

"Six o'clock."

"Only six o'clock? You must be joking."

"No, dear; you can look for yourself. There is your little clock on the mantelpiece."

"But it will hurt my eyes to look so far."

"No, I think it will do them good. There, you see it is six o'clock."

"So it is; how simply wonderful! I have not been awake at six o'clock, and sitting up like this, since I don't know when—not since father was poor, and I used to help mother with the housework."

"Ah! you were a healthier girl then than you are now, Elsie. There is nothing like good, honest, downright labour for keeping people in health and strength. They have no time for nervous fancies."

"Nervous fancies?" she answered, colouring very high. "You don't think my—my illness is all nerves?"

It was, almost wholly nervous, but I did not want to tell her so just then. I replied—

"Your nerves are considerably out of order; but I am not going to talk about your complaints. Will you kindly tell me, if you can possibly remember it, where I can get a step-ladder? I don't suppose any of the servants are up yet?"

"The kitchen-maid is very likely to be up. I am sure there are plenty of step-ladders downstairs."

"Very well, I will find one somewhere. I also should like to see the housemaid."

I left the room, and wandered about the spacious, ugly, oppressive house for a long time, finding my way at last into the kitchen regions. There I discovered

an under-housemaid and also a kitchen-maid. They started and uttered exclamations of astonishment when they saw me. I briefly explained the position, and seeing that the girls were intelligent, and looked reliable, I took them to a certain extent into my confidence. The housemaid rose to the occasion immediately.

"Oh, I'll help you, doctor," she said. "I never did hold with all that wrapping up, as it were, in cotton-wool; but I'd do anything under the sun for Miss H'Elsie, bless her."

"Well, now," I said, "get a step-ladder, and bring it up to the room as quickly as possible. Bring also some fresh white muslin curtains, and then I will tell you what else I want."

The girl, Jessie by name, worked under my directions with a will and a half. Elsie, propped up in her bed, looked on with a sweet, surprised, interested smile. The heavy velvet curtains were removed from the tall windows, and light and airy muslin ones put in their place. Having arranged the windows, I approached the bed. I boldly removed the curtains from here, and taking away the eider-down and one of the heavy blankets, asked Jessie to remove them to the box-room for the present. I then took down the curtains from the door, and had the screen also removed from the room. In short, I relieved it of a great deal of its heavy drapery. Having done this, I opened the window wide, and the door also, and covering Elsie with an extra wrap, allowed a thorough draught to permeate through the room.

"But the fire is out," said Jessie, with a sudden gasp. "Why, Miss H'Elsie haven't been without a fire for a year and more, summer and winter."

"Will you lay the fire in the grate?" I said. "It is not to be lit for the present. If Miss Elsie complains of chill, of course she shall have a fire, more particularly as I want her to sit for the greater part of the day by the open window."

"Oh, I shall catch my death of cold," said Elsie.

"Now, my dear child, it is against the rules for you to interfere with the doctor," I said. "The room looks much better, does it not, Jessie?"

"Wonderful light and pretty," said Jessie; "why, the air it seems elastic like, not what it wore, all heavy as it wore loaded with lead."

"Now, please go downstairs," I said, "and try if you can find me any flowers. There is doubtless a small garden at the back of this house."

"Not much of a garden, doctor, but a large greenhouse."

"That is better still; the gardener has probably arrived by now. Tell him I want some of his prettiest flowering plants in pots. I want half-a-dozen pots at least, and the flowers if possible must have sweet smells. Bring them right up here, Jessie, and also get me a small table to put by the bedside, and another little table for the flowers to stand on, and a novel or two."

"A novel!" cried Jessie; "but there ain't such a thing in the 'ouse. The mistress don't hold with reading novels."

"My patient has got to read some," I said. "Elsie, did you ever read 'John Halifax'?"

"No," replied Elsie; "I don't even know what it is."

"It is a story of one of the most splendid men who

was ever created in fiction," I replied ; "you shall have it to-day, my dear."

"But my eyes?"

"My dear child, a little reading will do your eyes good. There is nothing the matter with them except that they are weak from want of light and use. Eyes are meant to see with, Elsie, and not to sit in the dark with. Come, I will soon have you a different girl."

She was so excited and pleased at all my preparations, that colour came into her face, and a sparkle of hope into her brown eyes. I washed her carefully, put on a clean and pretty night-dress with blue ribbons at her throat and wrists, and then made her lie down in bed.

"You will have your breakfast in about an hour," I said ; "after that I mean to get you up."

It was between eight and nine o'clock when Mr. Tomlinson, unshaven and only half-dressed, popped his head round the door. He was coming in on tip-toe expecting to see a shaded room, and to be greeted by the low moans of his daughter. Instead of this he saw a bright and airy summer-like apartment, the windows open, roses and mignonette in pots on a small table at the foot of the bed, and Elsie herself smiling at him from her raised pillows.

"Bless us and save us!" he cried. "Doctor, what does this mean?"

"Recovery," I answered, in a cheerful voice. "I am coming downstairs to breakfast with you presently, Mr. Tomlinson, and let me assure you that I am very hungry. Please go up to Elsie and kiss her; she is better this morning, aren't you, Elsie?"

"Oh, so happy!" replied Elsie.

Mr. Tomlinson crossed the room, his long face growing longer; but when he approached the bed and looked down at the child, and was greeted by her smile, a smile of hope and of the first dawning of recovery, the pallor on his face gave way to crimson. He turned round and clutched one of my hands with both of his.

"God bless you!" he said. He turned away, leant up against the mantelpiece, and burst into tears.

"Come, come," I said, "this is very bad for the patient. Please go out of the room, I will be with you in a few minutes."

Little Elsie turned white at the sight of her father's emotion.

"I am going to get well, father," she said in the feeblest of voices, and then he rushed away as I bade him do.

An hour later I was enjoying breakfast in the heavily-furnished dining-room of the mansion. Mr. and Mrs. Tomlinson could not enough load me with thanks. They stared at me as though I were a superior being.

"It's the courage of the thing that takes me," said Mr. Tomlinson. "To turn everything topsy-turvy and introduce all that blessed air, and have the white curtains up—the room is like a bower. Did you see it, wife? I never saw anything more changed in my life."

"And to think," said Mrs. Tomlinson, "that those frilled muslin curtains used to be up in the little drawing-room at Chelsea, and now they're in Elsie's grand room. It seems like a good sign, that it do."

"Now," I said, "I want to talk to you both for a moment or two, for I must leave Elsie almost immediately to attend to my other duties."

"But you just can't," said Mr. Tomlinson; "you have taken up the case and you are going to see it through."

"I shall come to see her twice a day for the present, afterwards it will not be necessary to see her so often."

"But who is to carry on the treatment?" said Mr. Tomlinson. "Now look here, doctor, you have got to listen to a word from me. Money is no object, you can name your own price. If it's a hundred pounds a week you shall have it, but stay with the child you must."

"I could not take your money without earning it," I replied; "and it is impossible for me to stay with Elsie day and night. I have other things to do. What I want to suggest is this. I shall send in an excellent nurse of my own choosing in the course of the morning. I shall see her first and give her directions. She will carry on the work which I have already begun. Your daughter is already out of danger, and will be practically well in a few weeks from now."

The couple were displeased; they struggled against my mandate, they begged and implored of me to reconsider the situation. Mr. Tomlinson offered me two hundred pounds a week, but I was obdurate.

"It would not be good for her," I said. "The hope of seeing me twice a day will be a stimulant which will do her fifty times more good than if I were always with her. By the way, Mrs. Tomlinson, I want the child to amuse herself with some novels. I am going to send her in 'John Halifax'—you know the book, of course."

"I never read works of fiction," said Mrs. Tomlinson. "I consider them devices of the evil one for the destruction of the immortal soul."

"I cannot agree with you," I replied. "Some novels

are bad of course, but others are excellent. Truths which can only reach the heart by such means are often inculcated. The good novel is a very powerful lever for——”

“Now you are getting us a bit out of our depths,” cried Mr. Tomlinson. “We are very much interested in what you say about Elsie, and we consider your treatment up to the present wonderful, miraculous, no less; but when you come to novels, trash I call ’em; I am bound to say I agree with the wife.”

“Well, I differ from you both,” I replied. “Please remember that I have the charge of this case. I wish Elsie to read a few novels at present, and I am going to suggest that she begins with ‘John Halifax.’ It is a very good book; it will rouse her healthiest instincts, and what is better, take her completely out of herself. Nurse shall bring her a copy when she comes.”

“Well, this is a very trying order,” said the mother; “seeing that we both strongly disapprove, I must say——”

“Remember your bargain,” I said, looking from one to the other. “I am to be given a perfectly free hand.”

“Right you are,” said the father. “My dear Susan, we must yield; do not say anything more.”

“But her eyes?” pleaded poor Mrs. Tomlinson; “you forget how reading will hurt her eyes.”

“Reading in moderation will strengthen her eyes, and nurse can read aloud to her when she is weary. By the way, I want her also to be amused by some games, such as halma and draughts and chess if she knows anything about it. Nurse can bring in these games also if they are not in the house. And finally, Mrs. Tomlinson,

there is one thing more—don't please speak of Elsie's illness in her presence, don't even ask her how she is; appear to forget all about it; tell her news from outside."

"Now that is excellent advice," said Mr. Tomlinson. "I am sure, doctor, I beg your pardon a thousand times when I spoke of lady doctors as silly; you are about the wisest woman I ever met. It does fret me when the wife goes through her catechism: 'Is your throat sore, Elsie? Let me look at your tongue. Do you feel feverish, dear? How is the cough? Do the eyes ache?' and of course the poor child begins to fancy that her throat is sore and her eyes do ache."

"Come," I interrupted, "you are just as bad in your own way. I am not going to allow Mrs. Tomlinson to be abused any more by you. Who gave her Johnson's Tincture and Herriot's Pills and Dr. Gilbert's Golden Globules?"

"Ah," he answered laughing, for his heart was light that morning, "you have me there, doctor—there is no mistake you have me there. Well, we will obey your directions, for we owe the child's life to you, and God bless you for evermore!"



CHAPTER XII

ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS

BEFORE I went away I got Elsie up. I overhauled her wardrobe and finally chose a very pretty dress of light cashmere, pale blue in colour, with lace ruffles round the neck and wrists. When I had washed her carefully, and brushed her pretty hair, I put on the becoming robe. I then took her to the glass and made her look at herself.

"Now, don't you think you are quite too sweet to lie hidden away in a corner to fade and shrink out of life?" I asked.

"Am I like that?" she answered, gazing at her charming face, with a dimple coming and going on her cheek.

"You are pretty now," I replied; "but if you look after yourself and follow my directions, you will be lovely in a month's time. Now, Elsie, I have not the slightest idea of allowing that loveliness to be hidden. But come, you have seen enough of your own face at present. I don't want you to notice how worn those cheeks are, which ought to be rosy, nor how little colour you have in those charming lips. I shall take you to the glass this day week, and we will note the change,

the vast improvement. No, you are not to go into that dark corner; you are to lie here in the light, on this comfortable sofa."

The sofa was put at the end of the bed. It faced the window; the breeze was coming in very gently and softly like a zephyr, and wafted on the wings of the breeze were a thousand sweet smells from the garden outside and from the roses and mignonette on the little table which stood by one of the windows.

"This sofa turns very easily," I said; "and when nurse comes——"

"Nurse!" said the girl.

"Such a very nice, charming nurse I am going to send you, little woman. She will do exactly what you want, and make you as happy as the day is long. Ask her something about her history, for she was once like you. I know the very girl I have in my mind's eye. She will be pretty and sweet to look at, and she can sing like a bird. She will do anything you want to make you comfortable. If the light comes into your eyes, this sofa can be turned away from the window; and when you want to look out, it can be turned back again. And then, three or four times a day, Elsie, nurse is to take you walking up and down this room. There, dear, I think that is all for the present. When your mother brings you your food you are to take it whether you like it or not, remember; and when your book comes, read a little of it, but not too much. I don't want you to be overtired the first day; and I will look in again about six this evening, when I hope to see a grateful Elsie, much better for the care her doctor has given her."

"Before you go, kneel down by my side," said Elsie.

I did what she asked. She raised her face to mine.

"Kiss me," she said.

I bent and kissed her cheek.

"I should like to hug you," she cried.

"Quite unnecessary, my child; it would take away some of the little strength you possess. There, I know you are grateful, and I don't want words about it. You will help me best, and help yourself best, by getting well as fast as possible."

Then I went out of the room. Mrs. Tomlinson was waiting in the passage. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes had red rims round them.

"It's with joy I am crying, dear," she said; "I have had a good bout, and I won't deny it."

"You ought not to have cried," I answered; "it will be very bad for Elsie if she sees the marks of tears on your face. I have made her quite comfortable; she is a little tired after all the exertion I have made her go through; so please let her have some soup in half-an-hour's time, strong soup, and not too much of it. Give her a pigeon or some other light dainty for her dinner. Don't overfeed her, but make her meals very tempting, and see that she eats them. I hope nurse will be with you in the course of the morning; and now, don't keep me, please, for I have a great deal to attend to."

I ran downstairs and out of the house. I felt in high spirits. My first case was turning out a marked success. I should save Elsie.

As I rode to town, partly in an omnibus, partly by train, her sad face passed many times before my mental vision. She was too good to be dragged to an early

grave. Yes, I should save her, and make her a useful as well as a beautiful woman.

I had barely time to send a telegram to Nurse Fraser, desiring her to go as quickly as possible to Brixton, and then to see George. I told him that I should be out to all patients that morning, and then I hurried off to Hoxton. I called at Dr. Erle's house soon after eleven o'clock. It was a modest little house in a modest street; there were green venetian blinds to the windows, and outside these were window-boxes, with flowers struggling into bloom. The air, comparatively fresh at Brixton, was heavy here, and close. The sun could not come through a thick cloud which was enveloping the sky. I ran up the steps and sounded the bell. After a moment's delay a boy in a page's livery opened the door.

"Is Dr. Erle in?" I asked.

"The doctor is in his surgery, miss," was the reply; "did you want to see him?"

"Yes," I answered; "tell him that Dr. Gifford has called in answer to his letter."

"Oh, if you are Dr. Gifford," replied the lad, "the doctor is expecting you. Come in 'ere, will you?"

He opened a door to the left of the hall and ushered me in. The room was neat and plain. There were a few good books on a shelf, and one or two photogravures of really beautiful pictures hung on the walls. A cigar-case stood open on the mantelpiece, and a briar pipe was not far away. I had just time to make these observations when the door was opened and Dr. Erle entered briskly.

"This is very good of you," he said, coming up and

shaking hands with me ; " I am sorry I have kept you waiting, but if we start at once we shall be in time."

" What am I expected to do ? " I asked.

" Nothing very alarming. A few questions will be asked, and you will reply to them. Just speak the truth, that is all; there is nothing to be afraid of."

I made no answer.

" Do you know that you have made quite a conquest," he continued, giving me a keen glance. " I saw Liz Pratt yesterday, and she is never tired of talking of your bravery."

" Has she begun to feel the baby's death ? " I asked.

" I don't think so ; I believe she looks upon it as a happy release. You cannot judge those people by us, Miss Gifford ; they have been brought up differently. For generations the hardening process has been going on ; in some instances it produces ossification."

He sighed as he spoke, and a quick gleam of compassion stirred the depths in his bright eyes, vanishing almost as quickly as it came.

" Ah ! " he said abruptly, " try as we will, we cannot quite put ourselves in their place. For long generations the thing has been going on, and a lifetime given up to them is but little. They need the help of some thousands of us to push their millions into the right course. But come, we can talk as we go to the place."

He opened the door, and ushered me out. A moment later I was walking by his side down the squalid streets ; presently we reached the small hall where the inquest was being held. The coroner was there, a couple of policemen also, and a crowd of women. Amongst the latter I recognised the flushed face of Liz Pratt. As the

doctor and I walked up the room Ann Spicer stretched out her hand and touched him on the sleeve.

"Tom's dyin'," she said.

"I'll see him presently," replied Dr. Erle. He nodded to her, and again that look of compassion filled his eyes. We reached the farther end of the room, and the business of the day began. It is unnecessary for me to go into particulars; the evidence was quite clear and conclusive. The child had been killed by an accident. I was asked several questions, and I described exactly what occurred. The coroner's verdict was that the baby had come by its death through an accident, and the proceedings closed.

"Now, doctor," said Ann Spicer. She went eagerly up to John Erle, and touched him again on his sleeve.

"He can't rest until you come along, doctor," she said; "you've got to come right away this blessed minute."

Dr. Erle glanced at me.

"Do you mind coming with me?" he asked suddenly; "the case may interest you; the poor lad is suffering from advanced phthisis. He is patient and brave, the best boy I know in this dreary place."

We left the hall, Ann Spicer accompanying us. A sharp turn to the right and a rapid walk down some slums and back streets soon brought us in front of a building about five storeys high. I recognised at once a model lodging-house.

"I see you have got some of these people's buildings here," I said; "they are excellent, are they not? Has Ann Spicer a flat here?"

"Yes, but I wish with all my heart she was out of it. It has been proved by the most carefully gone into

statistics that the crowding of these poor people in one huge block is the reverse of beneficial to health. Small houses about two storeys high, each to hold two families, are far better from a sanitary point of view. But we will go into that question another time. Now, can you follow me upstairs? we have a good many flights to mount, I can assure you."

He went on in front, and Ann Spicer and I followed him. On the third landing Liz Pratt met us.

"The biby's in her corfin," she said, looking at me. "You'd like to come along and see her, wouldn't you? She's the purtiest bit of a corpse I've laid eyes on for many a day."

I promised Liz to go and see the baby after I had left Salters' Buildings.

Liz gave me a queer, hungry, almost affectionate glance, and said—

"I'm as good as my word, and you're as safe as can be along o' me. The doctor needn't come with yer; you're as safe as can be."

She stepped back into the little recess on the landing, and I continued to follow Dr. Erle. We presently reached the tiny suite of rooms which belonged to Ann Spicer. It consisted of a small kitchen—so small, that you could scarcely turn round—and two bedrooms. In one of the bedrooms, which was little larger than a closet, lay the dying boy. One glance was sufficient to show that he was near death. His face was thin, perhaps the thinnest face I had ever seen, but the eyes were large, and of unearthly beauty; the lashes surrounding them were long and thick, and the eyes themselves had a watchful, eager, strained expression,

as though a spirit imprisoned, a spirit struggling to be free, was looking out of them. As he glanced at me a frown of distress knit his black brows together; but when he caught a glimpse of the tall figure which followed me into the room the distress vanished as if a hand had brushed it away, and the smile of an angel filled the wasted features.

"Eh, Tom, not quite so well?" cried Dr. Erle, in a hearty voice.

"I am about at the end, doctor," was the reply.

"Ay, I think you are right, and that's good news, isn't it? Just the crossing of Jordan, and then right into home. What a happy time you'll be having in a few hours from now."

"But it's dark crossing over," was the reply.

"Not for you—for you the light will shine all the way across. Now let me examine this poor, worn-out body of yours; you won't have much more use for it, will you?"

Dr. Erle bent over the lad. As he did so the boy stretched out his wasted hands and clutched one of the doctor's.

"Ann," said Dr. Erle, turning to the mother, "will you leave us for the present. This lady, Dr. Gifford, has come also to see your son. She will help me to make a brief examination of the poor fellow's lungs."

Ann backed at once into the passage.

"That's good," said the boy, in the lowest of whispers; "her frets me now and then, mother do. Her don't 'appen to see what I'm a-seein'."

"What is that, my lad?"

"*Himself*, doctor. He comes to me. He's there now, over there." The boy pointed with his hand

to the opposite corner of the room. "I'm the poor, broken-down, straying lamb, and He's the Good Shepherd. He'll tike me on His shoulder and bear me home. What are them words you said to me once, doctor?"

" ' He took me on His shoulder,
And tenderly He kissed me ;
He bade my love be bolder,
And said how He had missed me.' "

" Ay, that's it," replied Tom. " Once He tikes me on His shoulder it won't be long afore I'm there."

He paused for breath, then said slowly, " Sister Jessica from the Hostel was round this morning, and afterwards Father Robson came. He gave me the bread and wine, and said, ' Unto God's gracious mercy and protection we commit thee.' He said too that ' he that believeth on Him '—CHRIST, yer mind—' hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation ; but is passed from death unto life.' When I heard them words, I wanted to go straight away. I'm mortal tired of the pain."

" You will go in God's good time, Tom ; and I don't believe your trials will last much longer. I am glad you received the Blessed Sacrament this morning. When next you drink of the fruit of the vine it will be with the LORD Himself in His kingdom. Now let me examine your lungs."

The doctor applied the stethoscope, and then asked me to come forward and put my ear to it. I heard the rattling sound of unmistakably approaching death. I stepped back more overcome than I cared to own.

"But come, how is this?" said Dr. Erle suddenly; "where is that new blanket I gave you?"

The colour flushed into the lad's face.

"I ain't a-wantin' it," he said.

"But where is it? Why isn't it here?"

"It wor mother; but don't say nothin' to her. She took it to pawn; it's all right. She said I should have it back again afore night; she didn't mean to be 'ard, and it don't matter a bit. I won't be 'ere in the evenin', will I, doctor?"

"By the look on your face, I should say not. One short, last fight, and then victory."

"But I'd like well to have you with me when I'm going."

"I'll come back if I can, but if not, you won't miss me."

The boy's eyes flashed.

"He'll come for me, you mean," he said. "He'll take me on His shoulder, and tenderly kiss me."

"Ay, my lad, and take you inside the gates. Thank the good GOD for His unspeakable gift; to Him be all the glory."

"When I git to 'eaven I'll think of you times and again," said Tom. "Before you talked to me it was all 'ell, now it's 'eaven." He glanced up at the dingy ceiling. Beyond doubt he saw something beyond that smoke-begrimed room which we were not permitted to behold.

I went softly downstairs accompanied by the doctor.

"That is a case worth toiling for," said Dr. Erle, when we got into the street.

"How sure you were when you spoke to him," I replied.

"Sure of what?" he asked, giving me a quick glance.

"Of the Future," I answered, the colour coming into my face.

"Yes," he answered, "if I was not Sure I could not work down here. You cannot go to these people with any uncertainty in your hands, Dr. Gifford ; you have to be positively Sure that there is a Paradise, and a God, and a Heaven, and the Forgiveness of Sin, to have anything to do with them. Without the Hope, sure and steadfast, it would be madness to live in a place of this sort. Yes, I am *Sure*."

He paused, his eyes very bright, then he continued speaking in a more everyday tone—

"The boy has one last fight, but it will soon be over. He is the bravest lad I ever met. You don't know what his past history has been, and what his trials have been. A thief himself, and the son of a thief, he was brought up without a gleam of light. Father Robson got hold of him first, and then he turned ill, and I had the charge of him. Oh, it was easy to work what looks almost like a miracle on such virgin soil. The lad was all athirst to learn. His was a quick, sharp lesson, and now he is about to enter into the joy of Paradise ! But there, I forget myself when I talk of him. Where are you going ?"

"Liz Pratt has asked me to see her dead baby. She is waiting for me now just round the corner."

"Then go to her, you have done good work already in that direction. You will win that woman's heart for ever if you kiss the child again."

He was turning away when I called after him.

"In your busy life have you ever a moment of leisure ?" I asked.

"I can always make leisure ; what do you want ?"

"May I come to see you some evening ?"

"Undoubtedly, if you wish it."

"What evening?"

He thought for a moment.

"I have nothing special to do on Monday next, will that suit you?"

"Quite well."

"Then be with me at seven o'clock; I can give you an hour."

He took out his notebook and entered the engagement; he then turned on his heel and walked swiftly away. I watched him for a moment. He had a light, springing, confident step, the step of a man who was quite sure of what he was doing and of what he meant to do, and who never for a single moment faltered or hesitated. Such a man would push through obstacles to reach his goal; and such a goal! Yes, he was certain. In an age of uncertainty and doubt he was certain! What then could he not achieve! The earnestness in his eye, the singleness of his aim, set my heart beating.

I walked on, turned the corner, and joined Liz Pratt. A few moments later I found myself in the room with the dead baby. The little one had been placed in a tiny coffin, and one or two flowers had been put over her. Her little hands enclosed a rosebud. The smile of peace had broadened on her baby face. Liz went up and stood over her. She looked at me.

"Purty, ain't her?" she cried.

"Very," I answered; "the little face bears the mark of great peace. It is so pure, and so like the face of an angel."

"Has you got the religious twang?" asked Liz.

"It is not twang, it is reality."

"So *he* says, and he's a real good feller. It's wonderful what he done for Tom. Tom were the larkiest lad in the whole of the Nile. He did a deal of shop-liftin' from time to time, and was the best snatcher I ever come across for his age. Lor! we has had many a lark with Tom; there didn't seem to be no fear in him, and he was that clever with his fingers. He might ha' been a buster (burglar) had he lived, but there, he got ill, and Father Robson and the Sisters from the Settlement was called in, and then Dr. Erle came, and it wor all up with Tom arter that. Lor! how he did give it to his mother—it wor *wrong* to shop-lift, it wor *wrong* to snatch, and as to busting, it couldn't be done at any cost. Why, the way he lectured us all were past bearing, and yet he seemed to believe in it, that was the thing. He believes now that when he goes away he'll go right clap into glory. It's all the same as if he wor a Salvation Army man. He is as sure of going there as if he wor a Salvation Army captain hisself. And now you say that this pore mite has gone there too."

"I say it with confidence," I answered; "she is safe and happy now with the LORD, Who loves little children."

"Then that's all right, and as it should be, and I've got the insurance money, and it's miles and away best for pore little Sal. You kiss her, and then I'll screw the lid on. She's to be buried this arternoon, and arterwards we're going to have a right down jolly time at the Green Dragon. Now, lydy, don't you begin to preach. I ain't ill, and I don't mean to take up with religion for many a long day. Kiss little Sal afore I shut her up."

So I kissed the baby and watched as they shut out the world and its trouble and care and sin.



CHAPTER XIII

A GIRLS' SCHOOL



THAT Friday was to be a specially busy day, for at four in the afternoon I was due at Miss Lawson's seminary in Brompton. I hurried back to my rooms, had a light lunch, changed my dress, and set off. The house was in a long and dismal street; the street lay low, on a level with the river. Its whole appearance was dullest of the dull. There was not much air, and there was no attempt at brightness. Miss Lawson's establishment, with its imposing brass plate upon the door, was a little larger than its fellows. It was a grimy house, tall and narrow, with some of the stucco falling off. A moment or two after the last tinkle of the bell had ceased to sound a smartly-dressed parlour-maid opened the door.

I announced myself as Dr. Gifford, and asked if Miss Lawson were within. Miss Lawson was in of course, and I was admitted immediately. I was taken down a long and narrow passage covered with kamptulicon, and shown into a small back room. The back room looked out upon a well-like yard. There was not a scrap of green, nor any attempt at a garden. After I had waited

in this apartment for nearly five minutes the door was opened, and Miss Lawson, accompanied by another woman, larger, taller, and stouter, entered the room.

"Let me introduce you to my sister Lavinia, Dr. Gifford," said Miss Lawson, indicating the stout person as she spoke. "Lavinia, I had best do most of the talking. I am glad that you found it possible to be punctual, Dr. Gifford."

"You will perhaps now tell me exactly what my duties are," I said.

"Well, Lavinia and I want you to see Flora and Ruby Smart; they are neither of them well; anæmic, without doubt. You will in all probability order iron. I want to write to their parents to-night, and should be glad to have your report with regard to their health."

"How old are the girls?" I asked.

"Lavinia," said Miss Lawson, "how old are Flora and Ruby?"

The elder Miss Lawson considered for a moment.

"I think Flora is fourteen and a half," she said, "I am not quite certain; and as to Ruby, she is a year younger."

"But it does not matter surely," said Miss Lawson, looking again at me, "a year or two one way or the other can't make the slightest difference? Flora is anæmic, Ruby suffers from the same complaint. You will see the other girls when you have inspected these two. Now, please, follow us upstairs to the drawing-room."

She opened the door, the stout Miss Lawson preceded us upstairs, saying as she did so that she was going to fetch the patients.

The drawing-room was on the first floor, and by comparison with the little room which I had first entered looked bright and cheerful.

It had three tall windows, which opened like French doors; they were all three shut, however, and the sun was pouring in relentlessly.

"How hot the room is," I ventured to say.

"Hot?" cried Miss Lawson the elder, in a querulous voice; "a pleasant temperature, I call it. Surely it is wrong to grumble at the beautiful summer weather. For my part, I rejoice in the heat."

She sank down on a low chair, crossed her small hands in her lap, and waited eagerly for the appearance of Lavinia and the patients; presently the door was opened, there was a sound of shuffling feet outside, and the stout Miss Lawson, red in the face, appeared.

"The silly children are quite frightened of the doctor," she exclaimed; "Flora is absolutely crying. Come in, Flora, and stop that nonsense."

"Flora, if you and Ruby do not come in immediately, I shall punish you both by sending you supperless to bed," said the thin Miss Lawson.

She did not rise from her chair as she uttered this threat in a sharp acrid voice, which was raised very little above its usual tone. It had a surprising effect, for the girls entered immediately. They were dressed hotly for the time of year in thick dark-blue serge dresses, with brown holland pinafores over them. The pinafores were none too clean, and the whole effect of the children was limp and wanting in freshness. Their hair was untidy; Ruby's was cropped short across

her forehead, and Flora's, swept back from an intelligent brow, hung down her back in rats' tails.

I got the children to sit down, and asked them several questions. I longed beyond words to see them alone, but that the two Miss Lawsons had no idea of allowing.

It was easy to see what ailed them. They needed what they were not getting—plenty of air, a little, not too much, brain work, and abundance of exercise. Anæmic! yes, they were certainly that. Flora's fat hand was so limp, that it was with an effort she could raise it in order to let me feel her pulse. As to Ruby, she was almost skin and bone; her eyes were half starting out of her head. They were both plain girls, and the treatment they were receiving intensified their plainness, and stunted their intellects. With a different régime Flora might have bloomed into almost beauty, and her brow, notwithstanding the dull expression of her eyes, was marked by its intelligent contour. Ruby was downright ill already, and I was certain that it would not be long before Flora was in a similar condition.

"We both take a special pride and interest in these two dear girls," said the stout Miss Lawson, "because their parents happen to be in India. The dear children have been given over completely to our care. There is nothing we would not do for them. Now then, girls, as the doctor has examined you carefully, you may return to your studies."

The children left the room more unwillingly than they had entered it. They had found me the reverse of disagreeable; they had even looked at me with interest, and had doubtless felt some of the sympathy which I had managed to put into my eyes, voice, and touch.

They went away, closing the door softly behind them.

"Now, Lavinia, paper and pen," said the elder Miss Lawson.

Lavinia waddled across the room, secured the necessary implements, and laid them in front of me.

"You will write your prescriptions now, will you not, Dr. Gifford?"

"First, I must speak to you about the girls," I replied. "You know of course, Miss Lawson, what is the matter with them?"

"Matter? Why, how very grave you are; there is surely not much. My sister and I thought that a slight supervision might be essential, more particularly as we were writing to the parents."

"Yes, our letter must catch the foreign mail this evening," said the stout Miss Lawson, "and our idea was, Dr. Gifford, that you would be willing to add a few words yourself, just to show that the children are getting every possible care, and that their health is all that could be desired."

"How can I say what is not the case?" I answered.

"Not the case! what do you mean? Just a little pallor in this hot weather—this glorious summer weather—is the natural thing."

"Well," I replied, "you must forgive me if I speak frankly. I don't like the condition of either child. Are you sure that the drains in this house are all right? Have you had them thoroughly overhauled and tested?"

"The drains wrong?" said the younger Miss Lawson. She glanced at her sister; both pairs of eyes showed apprehension and alarm.

"We surely did not ask you, Dr. Gifford, to come here to investigate the drains," said the elder Miss Lawson.

"Not in so many words, but you asked me to attend to the health of the school. Now, I should recommend that you have an inspector in immediately, and what he orders ought to be done at any cost. Those children are not well. Flora's throat is in a relaxed and unhealthy condition, easily attributable to some subtle poison such as would arise from imperfect drains. Are the rest of the pupils in a healthy state?"

"Perfectly so, I assure you."

"But I am to see them all, that is part of the arrangement. I shall not feel that I have done my duty until I see the whole school."

"You shall certainly see them," said the thin Miss Lawson; "they are at the present moment assembled in the schoolroom; you shall come down almost immediately; but first, will you write a prescription for Flora and Ruby?"

"I will give them both tonics," I answered, after a brief pause. "But what they want more than medicine is complete change of atmosphere and surroundings. If you could send them into the country it would do untold good."

"They cannot possibly leave school during term."

"Well, I only make the suggestion. In the meantime please knock off quite half the work, and send the children into the nearest park for as many hours as you can possibly manage daily. The little one ought to take cod liver oil and Parrish's food. For the elder girl I will give a different prescription."

I wrote ample directions for both children, and then

went downstairs to examine the rest of the school. All the girls looked pale, flabby, and as if they wanted fresh air. There was no doubt that they were all more or less suffering from the effects of drains not in perfect order. I gave my opinion frankly, and noticed looks of anything but approval on the faces of the two Principals. Just as I was leaving the house the stout Miss Lawson said—

“You have not added the few words we want to the letter which we are sending to the parents. Dr. Bart, our last dear physician, such a clever man, invariably sent a few lines. He died, poor fellow, of typhoid fever, and it was on account of his death that we thought we would like to have a young woman physician. The parents will think a great deal of your report, Dr. Gifford. Will you come up to the drawing-room and write it?”

“What do you want me to say?”

“That you are thoroughly satisfied with the care the girls are receiving, and that they are both in excellent health.”

“I cannot do what you wish.”

Miss Lawson's beady black eyes flashed.

“Your manner is very strange, Dr. Gifford; and for so young and inexperienced a woman——”

“Pardon me,” I said. “I may be young, and may not have much experience, but I am a thoroughly trained physician, and the symptoms from which Flora and Ruby are suffering are all too apparent. If I were to say all that I could say in the report, the parents would be much alarmed. You had better not ask me to write anything.”

"Under those circumstances, certainly not; and we are much disappointed in you," said Miss Lawson.

"I am sorry; but it is impossible to give a favourable report of the two girls to-day," I replied. "Have the medicines that I ordered made up, and attend to my directions, and I will call again this day week."

I left the house and hurried off to Brixton.

Nurse Florence had arrived, and Elsie was doing well. She greeted me with quite a bright smile. When she smiled, she showed two even rows of the most pearly and lovely teeth I had ever seen. Nurse Florence was full of enthusiasm about her; and as to Mrs. Tomlinson, she was waddling in and out of the room like a thoroughly well-satisfied hen. When she spoke to Elsie she seemed quite to cluck over her. All her low spirits had left her.

"Never saw such a change, never!" she said. "Ah, Elsie, my sweet, you may thank mother that you are better. Mother took the bull by the horns, didn't she. You would have been still taking those awful Herriot's Pills, and——"

"Now," I said, shaking my head, "you know I prohibit all talk of illness in this room. Elsie is doing nicely; in a week's time she will be a different girl; in three weeks' time she will be as well as ever. Nurse Florence, I should like to see you alone for a few minutes."

I saw the nurse in the dressing-room, told her exactly what I thought of the case, begged of her to be very firm with regard to treatment, and not to allow either parent to be too long in the room.

"I never saw such a fuss as the poor mother," said

the nurse; "but the child will do well; there is nothing very serious the matter."

"You would not have said so if you had seen her this time yesterday," I answered. "She was simply dying for want of light and fresh air. Really, the silly way in which so many guardians of youth go on is enough to madden one. I have just been to a school where all the children are suffering, in a more or less degree, from the very same cause. Keep those windows open as much as you can, nurse, and as you value my good opinion and the life of the patient."

The nurse promised, smiled, and nodded; and, dead tired, weary, but not unhappy, I went home.

By the first post on the following morning I received a letter from Miss Lawson. It contained a cheque for ten shillings, and the announcement that in future my services would be dispensed with. My refusal to write a false report to the parents in India was stigmatised by Miss Lawson as a very cruel desire on my part to rob her sister and herself of their daily bread. They were glad to tell me that they had secured the services of a most eminent physician in the next street, who had given a totally different diagnosis of the health of the school.

"Poor scholars!" I said to myself, as I closed the letter and put the cheque into my purse. "I wonder how soon Flora and Ruby will develop those seeds of consumption which are already sown in their poor anæmic little bodies."

I went into my consulting-room, and sat down at my desk. Owing to my honest speaking the school was gone. It had been beyond doubt a good opening, and

might have led to many patients in various directions, but beyond pity for the unfortunate children, it was not worth giving it a second thought. I sat and stared straight ahead of me. Yes, I was now occupying expensive rooms, and making little or no money. What was far worse, I was doing little or no work. Elsie Tomlinson would soon be well. I had lost the school. Notwithstanding George's efforts, few patients ever approached my door. I thought again of Tom's dying face, of Dr. Erle's manner towards him, of Liz Pratt and Ann Spicer, and the dead baby. A great wave of longing to cast in my lot with these people rose up within me. I was glad I had made an appointment to see Dr. Erle on Monday. I determined to ask him a great deal about his work, and if there was any opening, to offer to help him. The people in the Nile seemed to draw me. I had already made a friend of Liz Pratt. In a place like Hoxton you touched the broadest and the simplest lines of humanity. Life, Death, Love, Hate, met you at every turn. How to obtain the Bread which saves, and how to avoid the Hunger which kills, were the problems to be faced each day. Surely in such a place hard work must be the order of the hour. To banish the Darkness and let in the Light would be a mission worth living for.

I sat and mused, while my head swam and my heart ached. After an hour or two, in which I waited in vain for that patient's ring which never came, I left my consulting-room and went out for a long walk. It was now Saturday; on Monday I should see Dr. Erle, and having once put my hand to the plough, God helping me, I would not look back.



CHAPTER XIV

HOXTON



DO not think I was religious at that time, but I was certainly human. My medical work had brought me into contact with materialism. Many of my fellow-students boldly averred that there was no Hereafter, that when the spirit left the body it burned out, like a candle when it expires. They spoke of the grave as the end of all things. The future lay not in the individual but in the race, for the race might, and probably would, go on for ever. I need not quote the time-worn arguments which these people talked, and talked well. At the time of which I am writing I had not seriously considered the question. The first time it was brought forcibly home to me was when I listened to John Erle as he addressed the working men at Hoxton. A few days later it was my privilege to see the result of such teaching. Tom was dying—he was a thief of the Nile, and yet he was not afraid. Dr. Erle stood by his dying bed and pointed to a Hope beyond the grave. Tom seized hold of it, made it his own, lived up to it, and prepared for his last fight in the simplicity of perfect faith, and an assurance which admitted of no doubt

whatever. When I spoke to Dr. Erle about this, he had told me with emphasis in his words, and a look in his eyes which caused my heart to thrill, that he also was quite Certain, that what he spoke about was his own Belief.

On the Monday I prepared to go down to Hoxton. Before doing so I told George something of my future plans.

"I am tired of this place," I said; "I know well, George, that you have my best interests at heart, and I am greatly obliged to you; but I cannot go on any longer allowing you to make decoy ducks for my patients, nor can I sit with my hands before me. There is work for me in other parts of London, and money is not everything. If I am to be perfectly honest and above-board, it is all too evident that I shall wait years before I can get a practice."

I then told him about the school at Brompton; he shook his head solemnly.

"I ain't saying nothing agen your morals, miss," he remarked, "but you missed your chance there—and you're always a-doing it. You might have qualified the report without telling lies—I'm never wanting any one to do that—but you might have said words which would have satisfied the ladies, and not have got you dismissed from the post. You won't do, Dr. Gifford—not, at least, in the West End."

"Then I will try the east or the north, or whatever parts the poor inhabit," I said; "and if I go, I hope you will come with me."

He grinned at this and gave me an affectionate glance. I went off to keep my appointment. I arrived at

Hoxton a little before seven o'clock. Dr. Erle met me on the doorstep of his little house and asked me to come in.

"Take me into your surgery," I said suddenly.

He smiled and stopped; he was leading the way to his little sitting-room.

"Why?" he asked; "are you a patient?"

"I am," I replied.

He did not say any more, but walking on to a room at the farther end, threw open the door. It was a neat, bright little room, fitted up at the farther end as a dispensary.

"I dispense my own medicines as a matter of course," said Dr. Erle, "and generally prepare them while the patients are waiting."

"I am a patient, and I hope you will allow me to give you a fee," I answered.

"How little you know of the profession; we never take fees from one another." He stood on the hearth as he spoke and faced me.

"Now, Miss Gifford, what is it? I know you have come here on serious business."

"I have," I replied.

"Is your ailment mental or physical?"

"Mental."

"Then why come to me? Father Robson is a very good physician of souls, and he lives within a stone's throw from here."

"I want to see you at present," I answered, "for you are doing work which satisfies you."

"Am I? That remains to be proved. The giving up of one's whole life is a big thing—at least to the person

who does it—but I am only one man, and there are thousands wanted.”

“What you want,” I said, starting up impulsively, “are earnest, intelligent, self-sacrificing people, whether men or women. Now, I wish to help you; may I?”

“You?” He coloured faintly, then his eyes flashed fire. He strode across the room and held out his hand to me.

“Do you know you are saying a very brave thing? Do you really mean to throw away——”

“You don’t mean that,” I interrupted. “You don’t think that giving the best of all that one possesses is throwing it away when it is in the service that—that you believe in.”

“Ay, I believe with my whole heart; don’t you?”

“I shall presently; don’t ask me now.”

He had been standing; now all of a sudden his colour faded, his breath came in gasps, he sank into the nearest chair, and pressed his hand to his chest.

“Are you ill?” I cried.

“A momentary attack.” He brought out the words with difficulty. “It will pass; don’t take any notice; tell me about yourself.”

I saw that he could not bear my sympathy, and went on hurriedly.

“I think, perhaps, I had better tell you something of my story. I took rooms in Queen Anne Street after I was qualified, by the advice of a friend of yours, Dr. Follett.”

“Follett!” said Dr. Erle; “then you know him? He is one of the best fellows in the world.”

“I am sure he is, and he has been most kind to me. He suggested my trying to make a practice, and I

took the rooms in Queen Anne Street. I have been there now for over nine months. During the whole of that time I have had as a *bona fide* patient one anæmic girl who lives at Brixton—she will soon be well. The mistress of a school came to me also a few days ago and asked me to superintend the health of her pupils, but declined to give me the post when she found that I would not write false reports to the parents in India. A lady who owned to having rheumatic gout came once to see me out of curiosity. I don't think any one else has called strictly on medical matters. The severe course which such training as mine includes is not worth going through for such results as these, Dr. Erle. Down here I shall have plenty to do. I can work independently of you, and yet with you. Will you give me your advice?"

"You can cast in your lot with us here, and it would be a splendid thing for you and for us," he answered; "but will you persevere? will you not soon cast back covetous eyes to the loaves and fishes?"

"No, I can do without them; I have loaves and fishes sufficient for myself; I have three hundred a year."

"Quite riches," he said.

"Quite enough to start on," I replied. "Can I not work as your assistant, or better still, open a small hospital to receive some of your worst patients—non-infectious cases?"

"It might be done assuredly," he said; "I believe with your experience and with mine we could start on a novel line, and do some real good. The old hackneyed grooves are worn out; I always determined to work independently of any of them,"

He looked at the clock as he spoke.

“There is a case waiting for me, and I cannot give you any more time; I am very sorry. May I visit you in Queen Anne Street to-morrow night, we can then go a little into expenses. I happen to know a house which might be turned into a hospital, and which you could secure; it is close to Britannia Street, a street nearly as bad as Nile Street. You as the resident physician and I as the consultant might do wonders between us. Yes, it is a happy thought, Dr. Gifford. We will work together. Now, I must be off.”

He caught up his hat, scarcely waited to say good-bye, and the next moment had vanished. But my heart tingled with hope and exultation. I left Hoxton, feeling as if it belonged to me already.



CHAPTER XV

DR. FOLLETT'S DISAPPOINTMENT



WAS in high spirits, for at last I hoped that I had got into the right groove; but, after all, my plans were not to be matured too quickly. I found that Dr. Erle was a man of fixed views, and if I intended to go to Hoxton as his assistant, I must do pretty much what he wished. He said the hot weather was coming on, that, as a rule, dispensaries and hospitals were closed during the month of August, that it would be best for me therefore not to begin my work until September. In September things might be settled. The different sisters, the nursing staff who belonged to the Maurice Hostel, would all have returned refreshed. We could begin our campaign in real earnest.

In the meantime he had heard of a house which I could obtain for thirty pounds a year. It was a small house, but large enough for my purpose. I went two or three days later to look at it. The house contained fair-sized rooms—four, including the kitchen premises on the ground floor, and four on the next. There was

also a very large bathroom, which might be converted into an operating theatre.

I took the house on the spot. Here I could start three wards at once, keeping a sitting-room for myself, which would, I knew, be absolutely necessary. The next thing was to see to the sanitation, which must be put in perfect order; but the landlord, who was already a friend of John Erle's, was inclined to be obliging. He promised to do what was necessary, and my friend the doctor said that he would look after him and see that the work was thoroughly done. Then the wards had to be painted, and the walls washed a light refreshing green.

The question of furniture came next. I went to an upholsterer in Hoxton, and found him willing and able to help me. A great many of the tradesmen at Hoxton made furniture, excellent furniture too, which was sold afterwards in the best shops in the West End. With Dr. Erle's help I made bargains with these men, and got my beds, chairs, tables, and all other necessities at, I verily believe, cost price.

Having done this, I gave up my rooms in Queen Anne Street, and arranged with George that he and his wife were to come and serve me at Hoxton. They were both abundantly willing. The wife was to act as cook; George was to be general factotum, and was to accompany me when necessary to the worst haunts of the poor.

"I could not do without you now," I said to him when we were parting. "Your advice has been my balm and consolation during these sad months in Queen Anne Street."

"Ah, doctor," he replied, "you never took my advice. If you had, very different would the situation be now.

Patients would ha' been coming in by the—but there I need add no more.” He made an expressive gesture to show how hopeless I was. “All the same, I'll serve you wherever you are, Dr. Gifford,” he continued with enthusiasm, “for you are an honest young lady, and too above-board for this wicked world. It's a sore fret to me your throwing yourself away as you are about to do; but where you goes I go, and that's plain.”

I was starting for the country when George made these remarks, and I left him to pay a final visit to Jane Gillespie. She had not seen me for some time, and greeted me now with effusion.

“How remarkably well you are looking, Molly,” she said. “I should not have known you. How do the patients prosper? From your face I should judge that you are getting quite a good connection. How is George behaving himself?”

“Admirably,” I answered. “I have had a tussle with George, and in the end conquered. He is coming with me to my new hospital.”

“Your new hospital, dear? Have you been taken on as a resident physician anywhere? and does the hospital allow you to keep a private servant? I know nothing of these things, of course; but where is your hospital, Molly?”

“In Hoxton,” I answered; “in a street called Shepherdess Walk.”

“I have not the faintest idea what part of the world you mean. Is it anywhere in the West End?”

“No, Jane; no.” I could not help laughing. “It is a very dull place, about the dullest in the whole of London; ugly is no word for it.”

"Then what do you go there for?"

"Because fresh doctors are wanted at Hoxton, and they are not wanted in Queen Anne Street. I am perfectly sick of doing nothing. I have got my hospital, and have furnished it. I have also secured the help of an excellent consulting physician. I mean next to look after my nurses. I am very happy—I never was so happy nor so satisfied in my life."

Jane was about to reply, when there came an interruption. Susan opened the drawing-room door, and announced Dr. Follett.

"Really," said Jane, as she went up to speak to him, "you seem always to know by a sort of intuition when my cousin, Mary Gifford, comes to see me."

"I am delighted to meet you, Dr. Gifford," said Dr. Follett, in his heartiest voice. "Well, sister, and how does the world prosper? the house in Queen Anne Street, for instance—do patients throng to your doors morning after morning?"

"On the contrary," I replied, "I have only had one *bona fide* patient since I took the rooms; I have therefore given them up. I am going away to the country for a rest. Afterwards——"

"Afterwards?" repeated Dr. Follett, fixing his twinkling eyes on my face. "What does my fair sister propose to do afterwards?"

"To start a hospital at Hoxton."

"A hospital! A private hospital?"

"Yes. I have taken a small house; the whole thing is arranged."

"Then there is nothing to be said; but what a pity—what a pity!"

"Why so?" I asked stoutly. "Don't you think I shall be very much happier having more to do than I can well get through, than living the miserable life I have lately endured?"

"Oh, very likely," he answered, rubbing his hands as though he wished to dismiss the whole affair from his mind—"very likely; and, as you say, happiness is worth sacrificing something to acquire. By the way, have you got your staff of visiting physicians?"

"I have a consulting physician, Dr. John Erle."

"Ah, I see; you are bitten with his madness. He is about the maddest fellow I ever met. A man with great brains, and yet he buries himself in that benighted part of the world, and only attends the slums. I confess that I cannot understand him. Slumming is all very well in its way, but when a man carries the craze to the extent that he has done, and when a woman—well, all I can say is, that I am sorry for you both."

"I don't believe you are a bit sorry," I answered boldly, for I saw a twinkle of satisfaction in his eyes, and there was a smile coming and going round his kindly lips. "You meant to say something. You were asking me if I had got my visiting staff."

"Ah yes, child, and if I can be of any use."

"Oh, you can," I cried; "do you really mean it?"

"I do; that is, if you promise never to send for me except in a case where John Erle and my sister Molly Gifford find themselves useless. If such a contingency should arise, be it night or day, Dr. Gifford, you will find the old West End physician heartily pleased to do the best he can for you."

"That is excellent—excellent," I cried; "it seems to fill my cup of happiness to the brim."

Dr. Follett glanced at Jane Gillespie.

"It is marvellous what some people contrive to get enthusiastic about," he cried. "Now, there's that child—oh, you must allow me to speak of you as I find you, Miss Molly—I repeat, there's that child with youth on her side, and passable good looks, and passable brains, and not altogether without money, who absolutely flings herself away upon the slums. Really, if matters go on at their present rate, all the best-looking women and the cleverest men insisting upon going east, north, or south, or wherever the poor choose to picket, I shall begin to wish that I were a slummer myself. But you go too far, young lady, and that let me tell you. You should have persevered in Queen Anne Street. You have sympathy and tact, and I say that you make a great mistake in giving up the rooms. How many patients did you say you had?"

"One," I answered, and then I smiled, and a light broke out all over my face.

"Ah, you have a story to tell about that patient. What sex?"

"Girl, young and pretty."

"And better?" he asked, falling in with my mood.

"Well again. She is a beautiful girl, almost a child. She is well now, and her parents adore me. I am going to take her with me into the country, and——"

The doctor sat down near me.

"Tell me a few particulars," he asked.

I gave him a slight résumé of the case. He smiled once or twice and glanced at Jane.

"Really our young friend is unique," he said; "and so you insisted on her reading novels—'John Halifax,'

forsooth? that was a bold stroke; and the mother demurred?"

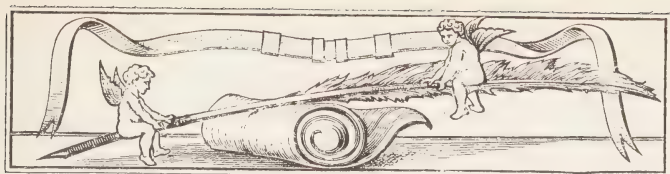
"Yes, and so did the father."

"Oh, how you did put your knife into poor Johnson's Tincture," he continued, roaring again with real enjoyment. "You'll do, Dr. Gifford; and although I think you are an arrant fool, mind you—and I never do mince matters in my opinion of my friends—yet I suppose you will conduct that hospital with spirit and determination, and do a great deal of good, and get a small amount of gratitude from some of the slummers. When you want me I'll come; but for Heaven's sake, young lady, don't get enthusiastic about your patients when I am visiting you. These people are a lower race than we are—stunted nerves, partly developed brains, sympathy and all the higher instincts nowhere, the animal passions of course abnormally developed. Compare one of those creatures with you, for instance."

I coloured with some annoyance.

"If we have made them so, is it not all the more our duty——" I began.

"Oh, come, none of that cant," he said, rising to his feet. "I have heard so much of it at goody-goody meetings. Yes, I am my brother's keeper, but I positively decline to be the keeper of my brother in the slums. Good-bye, doctor; good-bye, Jane. Yes, when all is said and done, I am proud of my young friend. Disappointed! oh, that goes as a matter of course, but proud of her all the same."



CHAPTER XVI

THE TWOPENNY DISPENSARY



I TOOK Elsie into the country, and we had a good time. She was a very intelligent and utterly neglected girl. She was all full of impulse, and her nerves were as weak as water. Any one could lead her. With the lazy, Elsie would be lazy; with the active and energetic, she would follow suit; with the religious, she would be as pious as a girl could be; with the irreligious—but there, perhaps, I ought to draw the line, for Elsie had a faith of her own, very firm, and very simple.

“GOD orders things,” she said to me. “I am never greatly afraid but that everything will be right in the end. I know He orders things.”

And this faith kept the little girl, before I found her, from quite being smothered by the softnesses, the padding, the inaction of the life which her devoted parents ordained that she should lead.

“You don’t know what it was to me,” she said in an impulsive moment. “It came on gradually. I was the heartiest, healthiest, happiest girl you could find until I left school. When I was very young, you know,

I went to a Board School, and I used to help mother in the mornings and in the afternoons, for we kept a shop then, quite a small one, and my earliest recollections are of hearing the shop bell ring, and telling father, as he sat in the little back parlour at his dinner or his supper, or whatever the meal was. But then, gradually and yet surely father and mother got rich, and from being fairly well off they became very rich. They took a house first at Clapton, a good big house—nothing like the mansion at Brixton, but still a fairly big house, and they kept two servants; and oh, if you saw mother trying to manage those servants—it really was too funny. She would not allow me to soil my hands doing a thing; she would not allow me even to fetch or carry anything—those girls were by way of doing everything; but most of the time poor mother did the work. She would say, ‘Call that a clean grate?’ and down she would go on her knees and polish it up in a twinkling; and she was always in and out of the kitchen, seeing that wretched little cook spoil the good food. Oh, what horrid meals we did have, except when something was brought in straight from the pastrycook’s. I think I first began to suffer from indigestion when mother kept two servants. When mother herself cooked we had excellent, wholesome, plain food. Then I was sent to school, to a fashionable school at Brighton, and from there I went to Paris for a year, and I worked hard, and father and mother supplied me with pretty dresses, and I was all full of impulses and happiness, and I thought how beautiful life was, and the girls were fond of me. It was about then I began to be ashamed of the little old happy home.

I hate myself now when I think of it. One day at the Parisian school—there were a lot of English girls there, by the way, and of course my friends were English girls—one Sunday evening we got together in a knot, and we began talking of our homes—our early homes, our first recollections—and some one said to me—

“‘Now, Elsie Tomlinson, will you speak. I am sure by your face,’ cried one of these girls—her name was Netta Price—‘I am sure by your face that you have a story.’

“And so I began to tell my story quite innocently, and quite happily. I said, ‘I have a story, one that none of you have, I am sure,’ and I began to speak quite proudly of father’s industry and cleverness, and of mother’s excellent capacities, and of the small shop and the shop bell. O Dr. Gifford! how those girls looked at me, and how they backed away, and how they glanced from one to the other. Presently one of them turned the conversation, and I saw quite plainly that I had put my foot in it, and had sunk in their estimation, and that I should never recover the position I used to hold.

“From that hour I was not very happy at the Parisian school, and the girls avoided me, and I learnt my first horrid lesson in worldly wisdom. I must not be true to myself; I must conceal that of which I was not one whit ashamed. So I did conceal it, and I came home. I was only seventeen, really too young to leave school; but mother thought that she would like to have me at home, and father wanted me to pet him and kiss him. We had just moved then into Miletia

Mansion. It had been furnished when I got home, and oh, how proud mother was ; and there was that awful footman—Dolph, she calls him—and a lot of other servants, and the place smothered up with curtains and carpets ; and there was my room, all spick-and-span, new, and smelling of the new carpets and the heavy new velvet curtains ; and mother and father were so proud and so pleased, and they asked me if I didn't like it ; and I couldn't say I didn't, for I would not bring a shadow to their dear faces for the world ; and I was popped into this kind of *poultice* life—I don't know any other word to describe it—and mother began to be so fanciful about me. Then father got a carriage, a brougham and a pair of horses—father, who didn't know one horse from another ; and mother, who had never before ridden in anything grander than a cab, and who generally preferred the inside of an omnibus—and we used to drive about in that awful brougham. Have a bicycle ? Oh no, father and mother did not think that ladylike, and they were afraid I might get hurt. Drive in an open carriage ? No, mother was much too frightened ; she preferred the brougham, even in hot weather. So we rode in the brougham ; and I slept in that stifling room ; and I used to dream that the great, rich, heavy furniture was going to surround me some night, and smother me ; and my nerves got out of order, and I cared less and less for my surroundings ; and then father said that I had better have some 'Cure-all Syrup,' and that did not do me any good ; and then he tried Gilbert's Golden Globules—how I hated them all—and then, at last, I took to crouching in that dark corner

where you found me; and I shivered with cold even in the greatest heat; and my eyes hurt me, for I hardly ever used them. I could not read the only books mother cared for; and it seemed to me that all the glory and beauty and grandeur of life was going to fade away, and that I was sinking into the grave; and when mother came into the room I used to cry, and say, 'Oh why did you get rich—why did you get rich?' And mother would talk to father, and father would shake his head over me, and say that I was breaking his heart, and that all his money and all his riches were meant for me, and that I must force myself to like them. So I used to struggle to repress myself, and I got worse and worse and worse, and I used to hear mother muttering to father that she thought I was going out of my mind. I don't know what they did think, but they went on giving me the quack medicines, and crowding on the poultices of that horrid wealth thicker and thicker, until I felt that I had not a will of my own, nor an idea left. Then one day you came. You walked into the room so briskly, it seemed as if you brought some fresh air with you, and you sat down opposite me, and looked at me—just one keen glance, no more. When you had given one glance, in which I could see you were reading down to the very bottom of my miserable, little cowardly soul, you talked nicely to me, and you drew aside the screen from my weak eyes, and then—oh, you know the rest. You have saved me! you have saved me!"

Little Elsie did not burst into tears at the end of this recital. On the contrary, she laughed quite cheerily and kissed me, and we went out together for a long

walk in the soft country air. We did enjoy our holiday. But the happiest of days come to an end, and holiday times were over. Elsie joined her parents at Whitby, and I returned to London to open my hospital. George and his wife arrived, and immediately, in a certain sense, took possession of the house; and I engaged three nurses, who were all ladies; and John Erle promised to look in most mornings. And then he suggested that I should not only have the charge of a hospital, but that I should also open a dispensary, which should be presided over by those properly qualified for the work.

Dr. Erle felt very sore about unqualified men, and he was most anxious that I should help him with a new dispensary. So we took a large ground-floor in Britannia Street, and started one right away. There was one very large room, or hall, where the people could wait, and a little dispensary for the making up of medicines at the farther end, and also two small consulting-rooms, and there every day either Dr. Erle or I saw the patients. We were anxious if possible to make the place self-supporting, but at the same time we knew that we must charge something for our services.

I took my best nurse, Sister Marion, with me, and she undertook to dress all the surgical cases, and another nurse came to dispense the medicines, and we charged the people twopence a week. For twopence any person who chose could have advice and medicine for a week, and laughable as it may sound, we did not lose money by this transaction; for very soon the poor patients got to understand that the medicines they were given really did them good, and they liked the sympathy too, and the kind word which often accompanied the medical

advice. And so they began to arrive first in half-dozens, then in dozens, then in scores, until at last there was scarcely a morning that I did not have quite a hundred people waiting in the outer room of the dispensary. The worst cases were of course drafted into my hospital, which soon became full. I had thirteen beds, and not a single one during the next two years, except during the month of August, was left unoccupied. Yes, I had started well; at last I was really useful, and of course I was intensely happy. I expected no rocks ahead, and hoped to go on triumphing and aiding the sick and suffering day after day.

The place was the ugliest in London, the farthest away from any open space where fresh air could be breathed, and where children might play and forget the sorrows of life. The population was thicker at Hoxton than anywhere else, and there was nothing to break the dull monotony of life, no colour, no brightness, not a gleam of beauty, and yet I never was happier than here, for here I learned the most blessed experience; it was this: there was not a human being who could not be touched and softened by the right word rightly spoken, by the sympathetic touch, and the kindly glance.



CHAPTER XVII

THE FOURPENNY DISPENSARY



NOW found myself in the midst of a very busy hive of workers. The Settlements for men and women in connection with Mr. Robson's church were close by. The whole parish was most thoroughly worked, and everything that could be done for the relief of the poor as regards their spiritual wants was abundantly attended to. There were clubs for men, and clubs for girls and women. The Church services were bright and inspiring. There were Bible Classes of all sorts, and Benevolent Funds, and Temperance Meetings, and Women's Co-operative Guilds, and Ambulance Lectures, and the brave men and women who came to Hoxton to sacrifice themselves for the poor were busy all day long. But still only the surface of the evil was touched, and the sin and the misery went on notwithstanding every effort.

This story has necessarily more to do with the medical side of life than any other, but I cannot refrain here from giving my tribute to the immense work done by the Sisters. My admiration for them in their noble

endeavours scarcely knows any bounds. The admirable system employed, the thoughtful energy expended, are beyond all praise.

The Sisters, and also Mr. Robson, often came to visit my little hospital, but still the work here was mostly medical. Illness requires very special administrations; and John Erle, who carried the spiritual in his face, and was ever ready with the brightest of bright words about a glorious future, even while he was relieving the most severe bodily ailments, was my greatest standby. He and I had to fight in our own way, and shoulder to shoulder. We necessarily came across cases which could only be touched and rescued by the knowledge we possessed of the body's sore needs. Mr. Robson's advice and assistance, however, were also of the greatest value, and there was seldom a day we did not come across him, or one of the Sisters who worked under him. When I started my twopenny dispensary he warned me to look out for rocks ahead, and I quickly realised the truth of his words. The doctors who kept the fourpenny and sixpenny dispensaries began to fear that they were losing what they considered their rightful prey; and one of these men in particular, who had a very well-known fourpenny dispensary, was the first to stir actively in the matter. He was a bluff, rough-looking man, of the name of Congleton. He might have been thirty-five or forty years of age; his hair was of a fiery red, and he had whiskers to match. His blue eyes had a ferocious gleam in them; and more than once in the evening I had seen him tottering home in a condition the reverse of sober. At first

when I appeared on the scene, he never passed me without an open stare of broad and insolent admiration; but this soon changed into a scowl, and I took now to avoiding Dr. Congleton's neighbourhood as much as possible. For the first six or eight months, however, of my life at Hoxton he never openly molested me; but at last there came an evening when this state of things changed. I had gone with two of the Sisters from the Maurice Hostel to a large conference of women workers at the Women's Co-operative Guild. The place was some distance away, and as the two Sisters were obliged to go in an opposite direction immediately after the meeting, and my way home lay through the slums of Nile Street, John Erle had offered to come to escort me. He had been visiting some people in the neighbourhood, and found that he could easily make time to render me this service.

The meeting came to an end, and I was waiting for him just outside the door of the hall when Dr. Congleton passed by. He half stopped when he saw me, opened his lips as if he meant to address me, then, thinking better of it, walked away a few steps. I had turned my back on him, and was still waiting for Dr. Erle, when I heard footsteps returning. I looked round. Dr. Congleton had retraced his steps, and was now standing by my side.

"Surely," he said, "I am not mistaken; you are Dr. Gifford?"

I bowed coldly.

"Then that's all right!" he cried, with a loud and insolent guffaw. "One sweetheart does as well as another for a handsome young lady, and I shall be

highly pleased to offer you my arm back to your hospital. Permit me."

The insulting words were scarcely out of his lips before John Erle walked briskly round the corner. One glance was sufficient to enable him to take in the meaning of the scene. His face hardened into coldness and immobility. Without taking the slightest notice of Dr. Congleton he addressed me in a matter-of-fact tone. We walked away without a single word having passed either of our lips to the red-headed doctor. I glanced again at John Erle's face. I knew that he had overheard the coarsely-spoken and rude words. We walked on slowly, still in absolute silence. When we turned into a quieter street he glanced at me.

"Surely, Miss Gifford," he said, "you won't allow the insulting words of a brute of that kind to influence you?"

"Oh no, I don't mind at all," I replied, but there was, I felt sure, a suspicion of tears in my voice.

"The fellow is simply jealous," continued Dr. Erle; "he is a low sort of animal; it is intolerable that you should have been subjected to his coarseness, but in a place of this sort we have to live above public opinion. I was told only yesterday that your dispensary and mine is causing the man almost to suffer starvation. But what is to be done? He is not fully qualified; he is a drunken brute, and ought not to practise at all."

"Some of the people who come to the dispensary tell me stories about him," I said. "It is easy to see that he hates me."

"He hates us both," said Dr. Erle. "It is one of the strongest abuses of this place that such medical practi-

tioners can find an opening. But do not let us talk any longer on this disagreeable subject. You are over-tired; I hope you are not over-working yourself?"

"Oh no," I replied, "I am as fresh as I can be. By the way, will you call at the hospital on your way back? Mary Dean, my poor patient with the cancer, is suffering more than usual. I injected half a grain of morphia, but even that relieved the pain but little."

"Poor soul!" said Dr. Erle; "such cases are intolerably sad, but her release will come before long."

"The awful suffering of such cases for no apparent reason is one of the greatest mysteries of the world," I replied. "How can a good and benevolent God——"

"Hush!" he said hastily, "there is a reason; you will understand some time. I will come in with you and see her."

We reached the hospital a moment later. Dr. Erle and I went up at once to A ward. Mary Dean, a handsome young woman of not more than thirty years of age, was lying partly raised by pillows on her back. She had a bonny face, with colour in her cheeks, and large dark-blue eyes. The colour, however, had nearly faded, and the tears were raining down her cheeks.

"O doctor," she said when she saw Dr. Erle, "the pain is so awful to-night; can't you do *anything* for me? Won't you inject some more of that stuff? Why must I live through it? O doctor, CAN'T you put me out of the world?"

"That would be wrong," he said, in a soothing voice; "you would not be a coward, would you, Mary?"

"Yes, but I would," said the poor creature. "I'd die gladly this minute. Listen, both you and Dr. Gifford.

If I had a rope or a knife by me, I wouldn't trust myself. You don't know what the pain is, either of you. It seems to clutch and claw at you as if it were a vulture tearing out your heart. It can't be right, Dr. Erle. If there's a good God, He ought not to let these things be. Why, look here, we're better ourselves—we'd put a beast out of his misery fast enough."

"I will give you some more morphia, and the worst pain will soon subside," said Dr. Erle.

I handed him the hypodermic syringe, and he injected a larger dose of morphia than the poor woman had yet received. The relief from pain came in two or three minutes; the anguished brows became straightened out, the lips grew serene; the eyes heavy, and yet glad, were raised to the doctor's face.

"Oh, you have come as a good angel," she said.

"Go to sleep now, Mary. Sleep will strengthen you and help you to fight on."

"How long must the fight last, doctor?"

"A month or so. The disease is making rapid progress—it has only to touch a vital spot, and then Mary, the gates will open, you will go into that country where pain and sorrow are unknown."

"I'll enjoy the rest all the better by contrast," she said in a feeble tone, partly caused by the action of the morphia.

"No doubt. Your great 'affliction, which is but for a moment——'" He did not continue the verse, but she understood him. She closed her eyes. The next moment she had fallen asleep.

"I have given her nearly a grain of morphia," he said turning to me. "She will have ease now for about six hours, then I fear she must endure her sufferings for a

little. Yes, these cases are"—he paused—"very hard to understand."

"You do not look too well yourself," I could not help saying.

"I had a return of the attack from which I suffered once in your presence."

"What does it mean?"

He looked me straight in the face, then he said after a pause—

"I will tell you, but not yet. Do not question me. That poor soul's death," he continued abruptly, "will be one of fearful agony. Well, and how do the other patients get on?"

"Pretty well, but I fear there is not much hope of Hester; the others are doing all right. Mary's is the most anxious case at the present moment. Her husband came to see her this afternoon. She was in one of her worst fits of agony, and the poor things had a terrible scene. He is devoted to her, but is himself rather a weak sort of man. Mary was evidently the mainstay of the family. He says he is going to bring all the children to say good-bye to-morrow."

"Don't let him," said Dr. Erle; "it is too soon; she has some weeks yet to linger. Well, I cannot stay any longer now. Good-night."

He left the hospital, and I returned to my little sitting-room. I was thoroughly tired, and the hour was late. To my amazement, disgust, and alarm, who should I see waiting for me there but Dr. Congleton. He was seated in my special chair, and when I entered the room rose with reluctance, gave me an awkward bow, and then re-seated himself.

"I must ask you to leave here immediately," I said in a voice of ice; "it is very late, and I cannot possibly see you. Whatever your business may be you must choose another time to tell me about it."

"Not I," he answered in a strident voice. I saw at once by his manner that the man was the worse for drink. "There is no time like the present—no time like the present. I say, young lady, the swain was not faithless, he came up pretty smart just as I was talking to you—but all's fair in love and war, and now this is my turn. I want to ask you a straight question, Miss Gifford. Is it to be war between us, or is it to be peace?"

"One moment," I said. I went to the door and opened it. "Sister Marion," I cried, "are you within call?"

"Yes," replied the Sister, coming out of a ward.

"Wait on the landing, please," I said, "I may want you in a few moments." She was a big, muscular woman, made on an enormous scale, just as strong as Dr. Congleton.

"Is George in the house?" I asked of her.

"Yes, but he has gone to bed; it is very late."

"I may have to call him up, but won't unless necessary. Do not leave this landing. If I ask you, send Sister Rose for George."

I made these remarks in a loud tone, as I wished them to reach Dr. Congleton's ears. I then returned to my sitting-room.

"I have changed my mind," I said, "and late as it is, I will hear what you have to say. I can give you exactly five minutes, not another second." I took out

my watch, laid it on the table, and stood facing him. The knowledge that I had efficient help within call completely steadied my nerves, but it had evidently the reverse effect upon him. He still remained seated, lounging back in my only comfortable chair, his feet sprawled out in front of him, and his big ungainly hands extended over each knee.

"You have not answered my question," he said, "is it to be peace or war?"

"It is to be neither," I replied; "you are not an acquaintance. I do not wish to have anything whatever to do with you. You and I have nothing in common. I intend to go my way, you can go yours. This is a free country. Now, if that is all you have to say, will you go?"

"No, it is not all I wish to say," he replied. He uttered a strong imprecation. "I'll have this matter out. Do you know, you impudent hussy, you ignorant——"

"Stop!" I cried; "if you cannot speak civilly, my servant will put you out."

"I will—I will," he said, recovering himself. "I am a bit hasty, and I know it. You'll forgive me, Miss Gifford, if I express myself strongly. When a man's starving and sees ruin staring him in the face, he naturally feels somewhat bad against the one who is doing it all. Now you and that other upstart, Dr. Erle——"

"No names, please," I interrupted.

"Ah, you've got a spirit of your own. Well, you and Erle between you are taking my practice away. I used to do right well with my dispensary, now I scarcely ever have a patient; they all go to you, drat you! for your twopence a week. What right have you to undersell a

man? it's against all the principles of commerce; and when you qualified yourself as a medical practitioner—not that I believe you are qualified when all's said and done—you agreed to respect the bye-laws of the profession. I say once for all, this must be put a stop to.”

“What means do you intend to take to prevent my going on with my dispensary?” I asked quietly.

“I'm going to have you moved out of this place; I'll make the place too hot for you one way or another; you'll feel my power. I'm not Roger Congleton for nothing; I'm twice the man your Dr. Erle is, with all his fine gentleman airs; and I'll get my patients back by——” another violent imprecation.

“Now,” I said, “having delivered yourself of what you wish to say, will you kindly go?”

“No, I will not go, for I have not done yet.”

He looked me all over from head to foot; his manner changed to a much more loathsome one. He crept slyly out of his chair, and came towards me.

“Look you here,” he said, “there's no good quarrelling, is there? The thing to be considered is this, Why shouldn't you and I combine forces? that's what I want to know. Now, why shouldn't we?”

“I utterly fail to comprehend you,” I said.

“No you don't; you're only pretending. By ——, you're as handsome as GOD makes 'em. You haven't got much brains—no woman has—but you've got some, and you know what I mean well enough. My dispensary is in the same street with yours—why shouldn't it be one dispensary, eh?”

I edged towards the door; the ugly, half-drunken brute followed me.

"Eh?" he repeated. "I have been thinking it all out. It would be a fine blow for that other chap. He's a quack, if ever a man was. I'd like to know where his diplomas are."

"Where are your own?" I asked suddenly.

He turned aside like a restive horse.

"Don't you beat round a subject," he said. "I want a plain answer. You've got a bit of money, and between us we could make the thing pay. If we were to combine forces we might run a sixpenny dispensary. Why, there's a fortune to be made that way. The patients have taken to you; you've got good looks—yes, between us we could make the thing pay. Now, see here, you've only to put your little hand in my paw, and there we are. We can be spliced up as soon as they say 'Jack Robinson'! I'm a nasty foe, but a good friend. Which shall it be, friend or foe?"

"Sister Marion!" I called.

Sister Marion appeared on the threshold.

"Will you show this gentleman downstairs at once?"

"Will you come, sir," said the nurse. "It is late, and we want to shut up the wards."

"Hang you and your impertinence!" he cried.

"Sister Marion," I said, "will you ask Nurse Rose to call George?"

"No," said Sister Marion, "it is not necessary. This gentleman will go. Come, sir."

She went up to him, and looked him full in the face. He started back when he saw her. He had been red until he came face to face with Sister Marion; then his colour changed, it went ashy-white.

"Come," she repeated, in a low voice; "you had better. You know me."

"Yes, I know you. How, in the name of Heaven, did you get in here?"

He went downstairs as meekly as a beaten hound.

Sister Marion saw him out, locked the door, and came back.

"There!" she said. "I wouldn't fret any more about him, if I were you. I heard all he said to you. He's as big a brute as is to be found in the whole of London."

"And you know him?" I said.

"Yes, I know him; I have known him for some time. I know a few things about him, too, which he would rather I kept hidden. Oh, they wouldn't interest you. I don't think you need worry about him again, that's all. Now go to bed, doctor; you look tired out."

I did go to bed, but in my dreams I saw again the ugly face of Dr. Congleton.



CHAPTER XVIII

BAD BLOOD



MY dispensary began to get inconveniently full, and what Dr. Congleton had said was quite true—I was taking his patients away from him. His was by no means the only fourpenny dispensary within hail. There was another in the next street, and from this dispensary also the patients came to mine. They represented all sorts and conditions of men—the fairly well-to-do, the starving, the factory girls who were overworked and underfed, the wives whose husbands were nothing better than drunken brutes, the children who had never known the meaning of real care. With such odds against them, it was hard for me to do much, but I did manage to do something. There was always sympathy to give, in every case also alleviation of pain, and in some there was even permanent cure.

“It’s the pain in my face, doctor,” said a fine-looking young woman of about eight-and-twenty, on a certain morning nearly a month after my unpleasant interview with Dr. Congleton. “Oh yes, I’ve been at Congleton’s dispensary. I’ve gorn there on and orf for the last two or three months, but I don’t seem to get

no better, and I 'eard from the neighbours that you was doing a sight of good. You cured little Jessie Pryce, didn't you? She was in your 'ospital for over a month, and you sent 'er 'ome fine and bonny, so I thought I'd just look round."

"Yes," I replied quietly; "but I can't talk now except about your ailment. What do you suffer from?"

She stared at me with her big, grey eyes, then said emphatically—

"That ain't Congleton's way, he talks ever so much; but I like yours a sight better, that I do. He said I wor took with a wiolent cold, and he gave me something in a bottle. I paid down my fourpence, and I took the stuff away; the stuff in the bottle were bitter, and warm, and red in colour. I've got a drop of it here, if you'd like to look at it."

"No," I answered, "I will give you my own prescription. You don't seem to me to have any traces of ordinary cold."

"That's what I thought myself," she replied. "It wor pain down in the jaw and in the teeth. He did say it might be an abscess, and if so, Nature would open it; I don't know rightly myself."

I examined the young woman carefully; she was in a depressed and low condition. Looking into her mouth, I discovered a large abscess at the back of a decayed tooth. I then inquired her history. She was married—for that matter nearly every woman over five-and-twenty was—and had five children. Her husband was a manufacturer of furniture, and was fairly good to her, but, as a matter of course, he took drink now and then. She did no outside work herself, but looked after the

children and kept the rooms tidy. She had always lived at Hoxton, had never seen the real country, did not know what it was like. I prescribed a strong tonic for her, and told her to feed well; in particular, she was to take plenty of fattening diet. I sent her away full of heart and enthusiasm. Mrs. Jenkins was by no means the first patient who had come to me from the other dispensaries; and though I made it a rule not to listen to complaints, they fell on my ears with more or less insistence.

I quickly perceived that the Congleton class of doctors worked on a simple system. There were three remarks much in vogue amongst them, and these were of so all-embracing a nature that they covered every sort and quality of disease. For the ordinary febrile symptoms, such as sore throat, rise of temperature, quickened pulse, headache, the patients were assured that they were suffering from *violent colds*. For abscesses or tumours, they were told that *Nature would open itself*. For cases of illness which, even to their inexperienced eyes, looked too serious to be so lightly disposed of, the victims were informed that this was a hospital case.¹ Now, as the hospitals in the neighbourhood of Hoxton are very, very much fewer than the needs of the inhabitants, this last statement could rarely be acted upon. No wonder the unfortunate people died, and that disease of every kind was rife.

Mrs. Jenkins benefited by my treatment. The strong tonics which I ordered soon put a stop to the neuralgic pains; a good dentist removed the bad tooth, and the abscess disappeared. The young woman began soon to

¹ A fact.

show rosy cheeks and bright eyes ; she came to me for two or three weeks running, and at the end of that time I pronounced her cured. On the very next day she reappeared. She was wearing a long face, and tears were brimming in her eyes.

"Now, what is the matter?" I asked. "Any fresh trouble?"

"No, miss—doctor, I mean ; I'm real well, and thanks to you, but I thought I'd like to come and say it myself. You've been real good to me, Dr. Gifford, and—but there, there ain't no good in beating about the bush, the 'usband says I'm not to come again."

"Perhaps you won't need to come again," I answered. "I wouldn't know you, you look so much better than the first time I treated you."

"Ay, that I be ; it wor fine stuff you gave me in the bottle—bitter as could be ; I could taste it an hour after. But the 'usband. It seems Congleton's been talking to 'im, and Congleton says you don't know your business, and that you're no better than a quack, and that as like as not you'll pisen us some fine morning, and so Jenkins he put his foot down, and he says I'm not to come again."

"Very well," I replied ; "I am sorry, but I can only trust that you won't need any doctor's help for some time."

"Ay," she answered, "but there's Jimmy ; he's my only boy, and he ain't too well this morning. He's complaining of a sore throat, and his skin it burns like fire. I was just going to ask you if you'd come round and take a look at 'im. I wouldn't grudge paying you any fee in reason ; Congleton gets his 'alf-crown a visit, but I 'eard Liz Pratt say you come to see folks for a shillin'."

"Yes," I replied, "I would visit you willingly for that sum, or for nothing if you could not afford to pay."

"Ay, we can afford the shillin' right enough, and so I said to Jenkins, but Jenkins he put his foot down, and said we wasn't to have no one but Congleton, and now I've got to go off and get some medicine for the child. I wish you 'ad the charge of 'im, that I do, doctor."

"Has Dr. Congleton seen him yet?"

"Yes, last night, and again this morning."

"And what did he say was the matter?"

"Bronchitis. He said it was nothing but jest bronchitis. You never saw anything like the blackness on his face when 'e 'eard I was being treated by you, and he up and spoke to Jenkins, and Jenkins swore that no woman quack should come into *his* 'ouse. But there, I'm a hindering you, and there are others that believe in you. I'm very much obliged, and I believes in you myself."

Mrs. Jenkins took her leave, and I saw my other patients. But much as she appreciated my services, it was evident she could not keep her own counsel, and Jenkins's words were repeated to more than one of the other dispensary patients. A few of them came into my consulting-room with discontented faces, muttering that they weren't quite sure what a woman had to do with medicine, and was it all right, and why was it Jenkins wouldn't have me to see Jimmy, now that he was so bad. And then a few added that Congleton was a fine figure of a man when all was said and done, and that masterful he was sure to know what he was talking about.



CHAPTER XIX

DRAM-DRINKING



TWO days passed without anything fresh occurring, but on the third evening when I returned to the hospital after a very hard day's work I was greeted by Sister Marion.

"A young woman of the name of Jenkins has called twice to see you, doctor," she said; "she refused to leave any message, but seemed in a dreadful state of anxiety; and there's a visitor waiting for you in your room upstairs. He has been there for over an hour, and he seems in a pretty considerable state too. He said his name was Tomlinson, and I was to tell you the very moment you came in."

"Mr. Tomlinson!" I cried; "I hope nothing is wrong with Elsie."

I rushed upstairs, almost forgetting about Mrs. Jenkins in my excitement.

"How do you do?" I said. "It is good of you to call to see me."

Mr. Tomlinson came eagerly forward and held out his hand; his cadaverous face looked longer and more cadaverous than ever.

"Well," he exclaimed, "and so it's here you have buried yourself. Dear me, I am glad to see you, and no mistake. You can give me a few minutes of your precious time, can you?"

"As many as ever you want," I answered; "and you must have tea."

"Why, this room looks quite pretty," he said, glancing round at the walls and then at the self-coloured carpet on the floor and at the neat and useful furniture.

"Not half bad," he continued; "and so it's here you have buried yourself alive. Dear, dear, dear, what a pity—what a dreadful pity!"

"How is Elsie, Mr. Tomlinson?" I asked.

Before he could reply George appeared on the threshold.

"Ask your wife to get tea as quickly as possible, George," I said.

He gave Mr. Tomlinson one of his fixed, footman-like stares, glanced at me, and departed.

"You keep a man-servant," said Mr. Tomlinson, much impressed, "and a well set-up fellow like our Dolph. Dear me, this is most confusing. I thought when a girl went to live in the slums that she——"

"Slummed," I answered, with a merry laugh; "but that surely is not necessary. I have not the slightest intention of slumming! When men and women of our class come down here they ought to set an example. The poor people whose lots are cast in such a quarter as this have dismal and grey enough lives without our helping to make them more so. It is because I want to put brightness into the place, Mr. Tomlinson, that I have furnished these rooms with neatness and taste,

not expensively—for that would be wrong—but still with all the comforts necessary for a lady.”

“And bright and pretty the room looks,” he replied. He went to the window and looked down the street.

“But what about the man-servant,” he said, turning to me.

“George?” I answered. “I regard him more as a friend than as a servant. He was my father’s coachman in the old days, and has known me since I was a child. It is almost necessary for us to have a man on the premises, and his wife does our cooking.”

“Well, I quite approve,” said Mr. Tomlinson. “Upon my word, it’s a sort of relief. The wife and I did imagine all sorts of things when you came down here, Miss Gifford; but what a dismal street—for all the world like that narrow street in Clapton, where we lived just after the shop began to pay. It was then we took to having servants, and Elsie and I first suffered from indigestion.”

“Elsie has told me all about that,” I said; “but you have not yet answered my question, How is she?”

“I am coming to the subject of Elsie,” he replied. He drew a chair forward and seated himself. He bent towards me as he did so.

“We owe a good deal to you, Dr. Gifford,” he said.

“I am so glad that I was of service,” I answered. “Elsie was my first patient, quite my dearest; I love her with all my heart.”

“Ay, I’m not surprised at that,” said Mr. Tomlinson, a pink glow of satisfaction stealing into his cheeks. “Ah!” he said then, a twinkle coming into his eyes, “you did for me that time when the wife had you in.

I was angry at first, and then afterwards, when you took the bit between your teeth and spoke up so firm and spirited, I felt that I'd fall on my knees to you, for I knew you had a power which I did not possess, and that you could save the child. You did for me, and for more than me. What about Johnson's Tincture? and what about Dr. Gilbert's Golden Globules? Ay, they had their death-blow as far as the Tomlinsons are concerned. We owe you a good deal, doctor, for what you have done in the past, and we want to owe you still more. Elsie is not the thing, Dr. Gifford; she is not the thing at all."

"I am very sorry to hear you say so; she seemed so well, so bright, so full of courage when she went to you at Whitby."

"So she was for the first month, the air seemed to pull her together wonderfully. I had a yacht, and I took her out sailing every day, and she did enjoy it. It was when we came back to Brixton, and Miletia Mansion swallowed her up. Dear, dear, it has a fashion of swallowing people up, has Miletia Mansion. I don't know whether it's the way the wife has; she never was given so when we were poor; but since she has put on flesh, and the house has put on curtains and carpets, it seems as if we lived in a pudding."

"I know all about that," I answered; "Elsie has told me, only she described it not as pudding, but as poultice."

"Did she, now? She doesn't take to that kind of thing, does she?"

"She hates it, Mr. Tomlinson, I am glad to tell you."

"Well, to be sure, so it seems. We did what we could, and I told her she might bicycle, but the mother was

in an awful fret. She had nightmares about the bicycle, and Elsie gave it up, for she's as good a little girl as you could find, and that was the beginning of her drooping again, although she took long walks."

"And have you given her plenty of novels to read?" I asked.

"Well, that's what I am coming to," said Mr. Tomlinson. He rose now in his agitation and began to pace the room. "I hold with novels after what 'John Halifax' did for her. I didn't hold with them before, but I have ever since; and I told the wife we had best have a subscription at Mudie's, and give little Elsie a free hand; and the wife was willing, although I saw it went against the grain, until the Rev. Josiah Chute came to see her. He's the Congregational minister near us, and he talked to the wife in an awful fashion, and the poor thing was fairly overcome; why, she almost had a fit of hysterics. Elsie found her sobbing and crying, and calling out that just for the sake of a little worldly gratification she was losing her child's soul.

"'The Rev. Josiah put it straight,' said my poor wife; 'he put it straight to me, Ben. He said, "Novels were nothing more nor less than dram-drinking, and that Elsie might just as well go to a public-house as indulge in them. Novels were dram-drinking to the human soul, and dram-drinking meant hell-fire." Those were the very words.' And what did the poor wife do but dock Elsie of her novels."

"Well," I said impatiently, "I can only say, Mr. Tomlinson, that it is a great pity. Men like your Rev. Josiah Chute ought to be banished from the country. Novels are meant for recreation and pleasure. Of course

I mean good novels. I did not suppose any one so narrow-minded, and so silly, and so wicked, could be found at the latter end of the nineteenth century."

"Oh, there you are, full of your old spirit," said Mr. Tomlinson. "I admire you, young lady, more than I can say; but, you see, there's the wife—she's a bit weak-minded when it comes to the Rev. Josiah, she thinks a great lot of him. Every meeting at the chapel she attends, and it does seem to me they have a most depressing effect upon her. What with the Rev. Josiah's sermons and the tea-drinkings at the chapel and one thing and another, she's nearly as low at times as Elsie herself. I declare riches don't seem to do one a bit of good. We never hear a laugh inside our walls. Of course poor Elsie isn't one to fight, and so she gave up the novels; and she hardly ever mounts the bicycle; and every day she goes in the brougham with the wife; and the colour has gone out of her cheeks; and——"

"Then, of course, she is as bad as ever," I said impatiently.

"Well, not exactly in body, but she is in mind. She is so terribly depressed, you can't get a word out of her, and often and often she goes away and cries. It was only this morning I found her with her eyes as red as a ferret's. I declare I couldn't stand it, so I took her in my arms and I said—

"'Little girl, what can father do for you?'

"And she answered—

"'Oh, father, I feel as if my mind was going. I didn't think I could be such a goose again after what Dr. Gifford said, but I feel just as if my mind was going.'

"It was with those words ringing in my ears, Dr.

Gifford, that I left home this morning, and after I did what was just necessary in the city, I hurried off here to see you, and now, what is to be done ?”

I considered for a moment.

“Would you like to send Elsie to me ?” I said, after a pause.

“Send her here to the slums ?”

“Yes ; why not ? Could you not send her for two or three months ? I would soon knock all the melancholy out of her. When she came face to face with genuine poverty and terrible starvation, she would be ashamed to think of her own puny fears. But there ! I cannot talk longer to you at present. I will come to see you, whatever happens, to-morrow morning. I have a day off at the dispensary, as Dr. Erle is taking the patients.”

“Right welcome you’ll be, doctor. But don’t say anything to the mother about the child coming here until you have talked to me further on the matter.”



CHAPTER XX

DR. CONGLETON'S PATIENT



WENT downstairs to let Mr. Tomlinson out. As I stood on the steps I saw Mrs. Jenkins hovering near. The moment Mr. Tomlinson took his leave she came up to me and said in a breathless, agitated sort of voice—

“I’m so glad I’ve caught you at last, Dr. Gifford. I want you to come straight away this blessed minute to see Jimmy.”

“But I thought Jimmy was one of Dr. Congleton’s patients?” I answered. “You told me that your husband——”

“Oh, well, he’s repented by now,” she interrupted hastily; “he’s out at present, and——”

“But is Jimmy Dr. Congleton’s patient or not?”

“No, that he ain’t any longer. Dr. Congleton was told by my ’usband as straight as straight could be that he wasn’t to come inside the house—they ’ad a quarrel, never mind about what. I want you to see the boy. Come along this very instant, doctor, he’s awful bad. If you come quickly, why——”

Her agitation, her terror, the nervous trembling which seized her, showed how grave were her fears.

"I will be with you in a moment," I said.

I ran upstairs, put my medicine-case into my pocket, secured my stethoscope and clinical thermometer, and set off. Five minutes' walk brought us to the fairly decent street where the Jenkins's lived. Some children were playing about in the gutter, but, on the whole, the place looked fairly respectable.

"There are only two families in our house," said Mrs. Jenkins, as she hurried on. "Do you mind going a bit faster, doctor?"

I quickened my steps.

"And we have all the top floor," she continued. "It ain't a bad place; we've four good rooms; and when my 'usband sells his work——"

"What work does he do?" I asked.

"He makes furniture—all sorts of oak chairs and tables, and even cabinets. Sometimes he has real good orders from the West End shops, and sometimes not. When he can't sell 'em there, then he lets 'em go to the Jews, and they buy 'em almost at cost price. But on the whole, 'e makes good profit, and when he's sober we have a good time. It's the drink that does the mischief; yes, that's the truth, doctor. Ah! here we be."

The door of the house stood open, and she entered at once. A small girl, with black hair hanging in a great mat over her forehead, was standing on the lower step, and evidently waiting for us.

"Is it all right, Rosie?" asked the mother.

"Yes, mother, he ain't come nigh the place."

"Come up at once then, Dr. Gifford; I believe we're in time."

"Is the child so ill?" I asked.

"Yes, yes; come along, come as quick as ever you can."

She hurried me upstairs, and the next moment we had entered a room which contained three beds; in the smallest bed lay a remarkably pretty boy, with black eyes like sloes, and thick curling black hair pushed back from his forehead. The room smelt close and unwholesome. This was little to be wondered at, as the window was tightly fastened. A very brief examination of the child showed me that he was suffering from acute diphtheria.

"What did Dr. Congleton say was the matter with Jimmy?" I asked of the mother.

"Bronchitis," said Mrs. Jenkins. "He said it worn't nothing to be frightened about, just bronchitis; but it ain't, is it, doctor?"

"No," I replied; "I am sorry to say it is something much more serious. He ought to be removed to the hospital immediately—not to my hospital, for the case is infectious, therefore I am sorry to say I cannot have him, but to the fever hospital."

Mrs. Jenkins's face turned whiter and whiter. She backed on to the landing and motioned to me to come after her.

"Do you think as Jimmy will die?" she asked.

"I hope not; we use a new remedy now for this special disease which has greatly robbed it of its terrors. The first thing is to find out if the child can be admitted to the hospital; if not, I must treat him here.

But in that case, please understand at once, Mrs. Jenkins, that the boy must have this room to himself. I will send round a nurse who can look after him, and will come back within an hour to administer the anti-toxin."

"What is that, doctor?"

"Something which will, I hope, cure the child. Now we must send to the hospital. Have you some one who can go?"

"Yes, there's Rosy, as smart a little thing as can be. Oh, do be quick!"

Mrs. Jenkins was shivering from head to foot. I wrote the necessary letter and sent Rose off with it. The fever hospital was not ten minutes away. She was back within half-an-hour. Alas! there was not a vacant bed; Jimmy would have to be attended at home.

"Well, you must keep up your courage," I said to the mother; "the other children must not sleep in the room, you must dispose of them amongst the neighbours—neighbours are always kind in time of trouble."

"Oh, if you would only be quick," she repeated, trembling and half crying. "What is that you have got to do for Jimmy? You're quite certain sure it'll save him?"

"I think it will, but of course I am not sure. I should like Dr. Erle to see the boy."

"Oh, you'll do well enough yourself, Dr. Gifford; what I want is for you to be quick; there ain't no time to lose surely?"

"No, there is not. I must go home first to get the necessary things; we will soon have Jimmy more comfortable."

I hurried back to the hospital, told Nurse Marion that I should like her to undertake the case, and said that it was a bad one. With a small case of anti-toxin, the syringe, and several comforts for the sick-room, we hurried back to the Jenkins's house. Mrs. Jenkins had done wonders in our absence. She was an energetic woman, and there was a fire now in her eyes which showed that she meant to fight to the death for her boy's life. A red spot burned on each of her cheeks.

"Oh, I thought you were never coming," she said when she saw me; "I know you have not been away an hour, but it seemed like six. Come in; the horrid thing is getting worse, he's half choked."

"We will soon have him better," I replied.

"Oh, Dr. Gifford, I do trust you," said the poor woman. She suddenly seized my arm, made a great effort to suppress her emotion, and finally succeeded.

"You must be brave," I said to her; "the boy's life depends on your keeping up your courage. This is Nurse Marion; she will help you to nurse the child during the night. Nurse Marion will sit up with him, and do all that is necessary. She is going to help me now to administer the anti-toxin. You must not mind if you hear him cry out. It will hurt just a little."

"Had I best be in the room, doctor?"

"That depends on yourself. If you can be brave you ought to be present; if not, stay on the landing."

"I'll be brave," she replied; "he's the only boy I have; he's the very sunshine of my life, the apple of my eye." She spoke with passion, and again her voice faltered.

We three entered the room. I administered the anti-toxin in the usual way; the boy cried out, for the

operation was accompanied by a little pain. Mrs. Jenkins stood at the foot of the bed, her face growing whiter and her eyes bigger each moment. She looked at me with a sort of terror which was mingled with both admiration and adoration. At last I had finished.

"Do you know what I have done?" I said, turning to her.

She shook her head; she backed out again on to the landing.

"You ain't pisened him?" she said in a whisper; "it's quite true that you *are* a clever doctor, and you *do* know what you're about!"

"I know perfectly well what I am about," I replied. "This is the new treatment. I have injected something into Jimmy's blood which will, I hope, kill the diphtheria. It may be necessary of course to repeat the dose, but of that I am not certain."

I had scarcely said the words before there was a noise on the stairs, a rough rasping voice sounded on my ears. Congleton had arrived, accompanied by Jenkins. The two men came up noisily, laughing and talking. I was standing in deep shadow, and they did not see me. Mrs. Jenkins rushed into the sick-room, grasped hold of Sister Marion, dragged her out on to the landing, and then pushed both of us with all the strength she could muster into another room.

"As you value your lives, don't say a word," she whispered.

"But what is it?" I whispered back; "what is the matter?"

"I know you'll never forgive me. I told you a lie just now. I felt sure that man didn't know anything

of what he ought to know, and that he was treating Jimmy wrong, but my 'usband wouldn't have nothing to do with you, and thinks a world of Congleton. It's my belief that Congleton and he are mixed up in money matters, but that's neither here nor there. Listen to 'im now."

Dr. Congleton had entered the sick-room; his voice, loud and harsh, penetrated to my ears.

"Well, how are we this afternoon?" he called out; "how is my patient? Bronchitis better, eh? Oh, he's doing fine; look at the colour in his cheeks; he'll be up and about in no time."

"How are you, Jimmy, my boy," said the father; "better, eh?"

The child muttered something in a hoarse tone, which I could not hear.

"I don't like that hoarseness, doctor," said Jenkins.

"Oh, that's nothing," replied Congleton; "bronchitis always brings on hoarseness. There ain't no fresh medicine necessary; you just keep him warm in bed with the window shut, that's all. I'll look round in the morning."

Mrs. Jenkins, who was now almost in a fainting condition, leant up against the wall, but I had recovered my self-possession.

"You have done very wrong," I said to her; "you should not have brought me to see the boy under false pretences."

"What!" she cried; "not to save his life? Didn't I know what that feller was?"

"Well, never mind now," I said; "I'll take the bull by the horns; I don't think I am afraid. You have done

wrong, but under the circumstances I forgive you. Now you must be brave, there must not be a fuss in the room with the child. I will see Dr. Congleton, but not in the sick-room. I will go downstairs; send him down, I'll see him in the passage, that will be best."

She looked at me in astonishment.

"And you ain't afraid?" she said. "I thought you would go back home as fast as ever you could, and perhaps come in again to-night unbeknown to my 'usband and save the boy. I'd work my fingers to the bone to pay you back if only you'd do it. He's the only boy I have, and him dying for the want of proper treatment."

"I cannot do what you want," I answered; "but send Dr. Congleton downstairs and I'll speak to him."

She went into the sick-room, made some excuse, of what nature I do not know, and presently I heard the man's footsteps as he tumbled heavily downstairs. He met me just on the threshold of the door.

"Dr. Congleton!" I said. He was about to go without speaking to me; but when I addressed him he turned, gave me a lowering glance, half facetious, half insulting, and said—

"At your service, madam. Yes, I know quite well that Mrs. Jenkins was your patient for a time, but the family belong to me now; I am pleased to say that the boy upstairs is doing finely."

"The boy upstairs, Dr. Congleton, is at death's door. The unhappy mother came to me and begged of me to come and see him. In her terror of you and of her husband she told an untruth, saying that you had left the case, and that I was at liberty to take it. I found the child suffering from diphtheria of a

most dangerous character. I have just injected anti-toxin. Let me tell you plainly that if I had not arrived when I did, the child would have been dead in the morning."

The man's face paled under my words, but very soon he resumed his insulting manner.

"So you did that," he said; "and you have injected that stuff. You've poisoned him." He stepped out into the street.

"You fellows!" he called out, "stop a bit and listen; I've got something to say."

Several men who were on their way to the Green Dragon paused, arrested by the doctor's words.

"You look at this young woman," he continued; "she knows nothing about medicine, and she's just gone and poisoned Jenkins's son, little Jimmy; you know the little chap, neighbours. Well, she's poisoned him. I was called in, a fully qualified medical man, and I was treating the case in the proper way, and when my back was turned she slipped in and injected poison into the boy's leg. He'll be dead in the morning, and it's she that's done it; there was nothing whatever the matter with him but a touch of bronchitis."

"Dr. Congleton," I said, "you know that you are not speaking the truth. I consider the child my patient now, and must ask you to let me continue to treat him."

"That I won't," he cried. He rushed upstairs before I could prevent him, swearing loudly as he did so.

Already a crowd of men and women had collected in the street below. They came up close to the door, surrounding me. Almost every face was suspicious and lowering; one or two, however, showed sympathy.

“Ay, she’s the good lydy doctor,” said one; “she’s Dr. Gifford, who keeps the twopenny dispensary; she’s a good ’un; she knows a lot; she ain’t pisened the little chap; she’s a real good ’un.”

But these sympathetic voices were comparatively few. There were others who cried out that they didn’t hold with women doctors, and these said as plainly that I had no right to interfere with Congleton’s patients. A few of the most rowdy crowded into the house, and the noise and uproar became each moment greater and greater.



CHAPTER XXI

EXIT DR. CONGLETON



CONSIDERED for an instant. My position was grave, and quite independent of my frantic desire to get back to poor little Jimmy, I felt some not unnatural alarm. The street in which Jenkins lived was, compared to Nile Street, respectable enough; but I knew that Nile and Britannia Street were within a stone's throw away, and that from their narrow alleys and dark courts all kinds of human vermin would swarm. The slightest rumour of a row would be sufficient to fill the street in a few moments. Already the news that something was up at Jenkins's, and that a woman was being badgered, caused the people to fly in our direction. Soon the mob reached across the street. I was still standing in the doorway. If I showed the slightest weakness, the most momentary hesitation, all would be up with me. To be torn in pieces or killed in any other violent way was quite on the cards; but then I remembered that even the roughest men and women respect courage. I determined on my line of action, and going a step out into the street faced the mob.

"Dr. Congleton has not told you the truth," I said

slowly, and in as loud and clear a voice as I could muster. "Will you listen quietly? I am not afraid of any of you; the worst you can do is to kill me; there are much worse things in the world than death."

There was a pause at these unexpected words, and then before any one could reply a red-faced woman came forward.

"I'm Liz Pratt," she said; "all the rest of you knows me. You speak right out, lydy, they'll listen."

Her presence by my side showed me at once that all danger to my life was over. Nevertheless it was necessary to prove my point. People of the Nile and Britannia Street order are easily influenced in the wrong direction.

"I do not wish to say a word against a proper doctor," I continued, "but the doctor who has gone upstairs has not been fair to me. I was called in by the poor mother because she was not satisfied with his treatment. He does not know what is the matter with Jimmy, and if nothing is done for Jimmy, he must die. The doctor upstairs has no right to kill his patients, has he?"

"Kill 'em! rayther not," said one or two.

"Well, if I had not been called in little Jimmy must have been dead by the morning. Dr. Congleton said he had bronchitis. Now, my friends, I am willing to bring Dr. Erle, or any other doctor you like to name, to see little Jimmy in order to assure you that he is not suffering from bronchitis, but from a very acute and most dangerous form of diphtheria. You all know what diphtheria is."

A groan from quite twenty throats replied to me. Ay; yes, they knew all about that scourge of the poor.

The terror of their lives, the awful death by suffocation which more than one father or mother had seen their children go through, was familiar to them all. Diphtheria was infectious. They backed away from Jenkins's house.

"Dr. Congleton treated Jimmy for bronchitis, and Jimmy was dying," I continued; "I have treated him for diphtheria, and I trust I may save his life. But a great noise is very bad for the poor little fellow. Will you all trust me, and will you go quietly home? You know pretty little Jimmy, and you would not willingly do anything to injure him. Please go quietly away."

The moment I finished Liz Pratt spoke.

"We've got to do what she says, neighbours; she's a good 'un. It wor she picked up my biby when it wor knocked down by the wheelbarrow; she's good and brave, and I say, Gowd bless 'er."

This cry was repeated by one or two, and then as quickly as the crowd had collected it dispersed. I re-entered the house and went upstairs. I had made up my mind. Whether it was according to medical etiquette or not, I would, if possible, save Jimmy. Dr. Congleton was too unworthy of the noble profession he had adopted to be considered for a moment. I must evict him, if not by fair means, then by foul. Out he must go; the child's life was more precious than his feelings.

I reached the landing. He and the father were closeted in the room with the little one. Sister Marion was still in the same room into which Mrs. Jenkins had pushed us both when the men appeared on the scene.

"I can't get in," she said; "they have locked the

door. It's no use, Dr. Gifford, you must give up the case."

Mrs. Jenkins was sobbing on her knees in a corner of the room. Her sobs shook her whole body. Her eldest little girl, Rose, was standing close to her mother trying to comfort her.

"Do stop crying, mammy," I heard her say; "I believe that Jimmy will be saved. Don't take on, mammy, don't take on."

"O Rosie, I must, I must," she replied; "I can't live if Jimmy goes, and they'll kill him between them. He was sobbing hisself fit to break his heart just now, and he tried to cry out to me with his pore little hoarse throat, and he begged for the lydy to come back. Oh, it's awful. O Dr. Gifford, don't you desert us."

"No, Mrs. Jenkins," I replied, "I have made up my mind. I have undertaken Jimmy's case, and I will see it through. You did wrong to bring me here by means of a lie, but now that I am here I will stay. Jimmy must be saved if it is possible. Sister Marion, have you nothing to suggest?"

"If we could get into the room I could do something," she replied. "We could at least lock them out, but you see they're in, and we are outside. I confess I am puzzled."

"But think, do think," I said eagerly; "what was it you did the other night? You just looked at Dr. Congleton, and he left the house. He was most insulting, and half tipsy. You have got an influence over him, won't you use it again?"

"It is true that I have got an influence over him," she answered. "The facts are simply these. I was nursing

a patient in West London, and he gave her a wrong medicine quite by mistake. He did not know what he was doing—he was under the influence of drink. The woman died. I pointed out his mistake to him, and he threw himself on my mercy. I promised not to tell if he would leave the place. What I say to you now, Dr. Gifford, is under the seal of secrecy; but he knows that I have him in my power. Yes, I will speak to him.”

She went and stood on the landing.

“They won’t remain in the room for ever,” she said to me; “I’ll have a word with Dr. Congleton when he comes out.”

Mrs. Jenkins and I remained in the back-room. Sister Marion stood on the landing. We heard the men’s voices in low colloquy within. Now and then there reached us a faint moan from the dying child. Mrs. Jenkins stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth, and pressed her hands to her ears. Rosy, who was crying bitterly herself, kept on saying, “Don’t, mammy—don’t, mammy, he’ll be better soon; don’t cry, mother, if you can help it.”

I doubt if the mother heard the piteous little voice. The minutes seemed to drag themselves into hours. Presently, however, what was certain to happen did happen. The men were tired of remaining in the dismal room, at least Dr. Congleton was tired. We heard his loud step on the creaking boards. He opened the door and then turned round and addressed the father.

“You promise now you’ll stay here and keep possession until I come back again at nine o’clock.”

“No fear,” answered Jenkins; “I ain’t the man to be frightened out of my own house, and have my own wife treat me so shameful. She shall catch it, shall Liz; it’s a

beating she'll get, and a bad 'un. Shut your noise, young 'un."

This last was addressed to the child, whose feeble cry for "Mother, mother," penetrated to our ears.

"Oh, God help me! I shall go mad," cried poor Mrs. Jenkins, starting to her feet.

"Stay," I said, "trust to Sister Marion. I believe she can do something for us."

"Well, I'll be off," said Congleton from within the sick chamber; "you mind what I said to you. The child ain't bad at all—a bit feverish, violent cold, no more. It was lucky I came in when I did. He hasn't got much of the poison into him yet, so it won't kill him this time. I was just back by the mercy of Providence in time to save his life."

The next moment the great ruffian found himself on the landing. Until now he had not seen Sister Marion. She confronted him at this instant, tall, pale, handsome, her eyes glowing. He was so startled by her appearance that he fell back against the head of the stairs, and would have tumbled down had he not caught sudden hold of the banisters.

"Now, what's up?" he cried; "what do you want with me, you witch?"

"A word," she replied. "Dr. Congleton, you've got to give up this case."

"Give it up!" he screamed. "Jenkins, you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," said Jenkins, coming forward; "who's a interfering now? I'll throw whoever it is downstairs." He used a torrent of language which cannot be repeated.

"A word alone with you, Dr. Congleton," repeated

Sister Marion, in a voice of perfect calmness and clearness. She opened the door of a third room, and going in before him, invited him to follow her. He protested, but finally, muttering and growling, went in. Sister Marion closed the door. They remained alone for a few moments, their voices, hers very quiet, his loud with rage and passion, distinctly heard. At the end of five minutes they came out. Sister Marion had a spot of vivid colour on each cheek, her eyes were bright; for the rest, she was as calm as ever.

Congleton looked crushed, as if some one had put an iron heel upon him.

"Just a word with you, Jenkins," he said.

Jenkins's face expressed his astonishment.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Well, I have been talking to this nurse, and from what she tells me I am inclined to consider——"

"Out with it, man; what are you hesitating for?"

"I am inclined to believe there is a bit of diphtheria creeping up the bronchial tubes. It ain't a very uncommon case, and sometimes comes with bronchitis. I didn't see it this morning, and I'm bound to confess I didn't examine the child very carefully, now. That being the case, and as I have to attend a woman in her confinement just round the corner, it might be best——"

"Speak plainly, Dr. Congleton," said Sister Marion.

"I don't understand, I'm sure," said Jenkins, scratching his head in perplexity. "You were ready to swear the biggest oath that ever passed a man's lips that the child had no more diphtheria than I have, and now——what's up? You're a queer sort, you are."

"The long and the short of it is this, Mr. Jenkins,"

said Sister Marion ; " Dr. Gifford in all probability can save your boy. If you don't believe in her and her treatment, send for Dr. Erle. There's nobody round here who does not believe in Dr. Erle. Dr. Congleton cannot save the boy. You give up the case, don't you, doctor ? "

" Yes, yes, have it your own way," he cried. He rushed downstairs without waiting for another word from Jenkins. Jenkins hurled some curses after him. His retreating form disappeared through the open door, and for a moment there was silence. Then Jenkins turned round.

" I'm blowed if I know the meaning of this," he said.

" The meaning is sufficiently plain," I replied. " Dr. Congleton is not a qualified man. By what right he practises here is more than I can tell you. He knows but little about the cases he tries to cure. He did not examine your boy's throat, or he must have seen the diphtheric membrane. Now, although I am a woman, and you despise me on that account, I am fully qualified. Sister Marion will nurse your boy during the night, and I will also remain with him ; but we can do nothing without your permission. There must be no noise in the sick-room, there must be peace and quietness. You cannot come in at all. Do you give us leave to do exactly as we think best, or do you not ? "

" Well," said Jenkins, " that's spoke fair enough, and the feller deserting like that, showing the white liver the way he did, is enough to sicken a chap. It's true I never did hold with women doctors, as the wife there knows. For the LORD'S sake, Lizzie, do stop that blubbering ; your face is bleared past knowing. It's enough to madden a man to hear you, that it is. Yes,

Dr. Gifford, you have your way, and I'll believe yer fast enough ef the child lives ; but ef he dies, you'll have to look out for storms. I won't forget then in a hurry that you put something into his leg, and that Congleton said you pisened him. Ef he lives, it's fair and square ; ef he dies, why——"

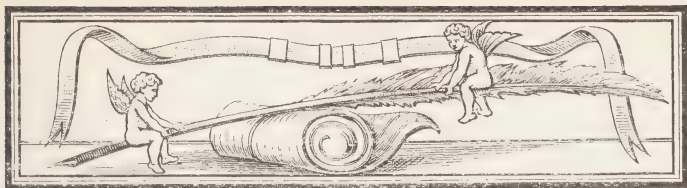
"His life is in the hands of God. I will do all I can, but I have been called in late ; he is very ill indeed."

"There ! you're funkng it now ; you'll have to reckon with me ef he dies, that's all. Will you take the case on them terms, or will you not ?"

I looked at Lizzie. She had stopped crying. Her face was one piteous entreaty.

"Yes," I answered ; "even on those terms I will do my best. You don't object to Dr. Erle coming in to see the child, do you ?"

"Have your own way, only save the young 'un," he replied. "He's the only boy we have, and the wife's heart is set on 'im. I never 'eld with women doctors, it is true, but have your own way for the present."



CHAPTER XXII

DEFEAT



GREAT deal hung upon Jimmy's small life, no less than all my future in Hoxton. If I succeeded in saving him, I felt that I should have won such a victory that Dr. Congleton would have little or no power to injure me or my patients in the future. If, on the other hand, he died, not only would a little life, exceedingly precious for his mother's sake, be lost, but I should have earned such a bad name in the place that it would be with the utmost difficulty I could ever work there again. My heart was in my work, and anything that jeopardised it could not but fill me with anxiety. I had good reason for my fears; the case was most crucial, the disease had made great headway, the child's strength was exhausted, he was so saturated with the poison, that he lay muttering on his side, scarcely noticing any one. The anti-toxin had not yet had time to take effect. If the disease spread too far into the larynx I was well aware that the new remedy could do little for it. The brutal and ignorant Congleton had so shamefully neglected the child, that medical science was now almost useless.

The room was dirty, and the poisonous smell with which it was filled could not but be extremely bad for the patient. Sister Marion and I consulted together. The mother must not be kept out of the room, but the rest of the children and the husband must be debarred entrance. I remained with the child while Sister Marion went home for the necessary appliances. She returned in an incredibly short space of time provided with everything.

"And I am glad to tell you," she said, "that I met Dr. Erle. He is engaged over an anxious case just now, but will be round in an hour at the latest."

She then proceeded to hang up sheets soaked in carbolic at the door; a bronchitis kettle was also quickly doing duty on the fire. We made the poor little fellow as comfortable as we could. I carefully sponged out his throat, and gave him strong nourishment in spoonfuls. Sister Marion having done all in her power to put the untidy room in order, sat down also and watched the patient. The mother, with hope now in her eyes, was positively clinging to us, being certain that we could pull the case through, and doing exactly what we told her. Jimmy was getting more lethargic each moment, but he knew his mother. It made the poor woman perfectly blissful when she was allowed to sit by the boy and touch his hand whenever he murmured her name; but I did not like the state of things; the anti-toxin ought to be beginning to take effect. I anxiously waited for Dr. Erle; two and even three hours went by, and still he did not arrive.

"Something unexpected must have happened," said

Sister Marion ; "nothing else would keep Dr. Erle from a desperate case."

"Do you really think he is so bad?" asked the poor mother.

I shook my head.

The anti-toxin would have to be repeated almost immediately. Up to the present it had had no effect ; the child grew perceptibly weaker. I prepared to perform tracheotomy the moment the breathing became difficult.

The evening waned and the night came on. The flaring gas in the street below filled the room with an ugly light ; there was no blind to the window, but I pinned up a curtain to shut out some of the glare ; I also lit a lamp and put it in a corner. Sister Marion and I fed the child with beef-tea and brandy ; he could scarcely swallow. I was just preparing to inject another dose of the anti-toxin when to my relief a well-known step was heard on the stairs, the handle of the door was turned, and Dr. Erle came in. His footfall was light and firm. He approached the bed, glanced at me, and then bent over the child.

"Get me a candle, nurse," he said to Sister Marion.

She fetched it. The child was turned on his back and the throat carefully examined.

"How much anti-toxin have you given him?" he asked of me.

I named the dose.

"We will double that quantity immediately," he said. "Ah, is that you, Mrs. Jenkins ? Why wasn't I sent for or Dr. Gifford before now ?"

The woman muttered something.

"I will explain to you afterwards," I said; "*she* is not to blame."

We administered the anti-toxin; the child's groans grew feebler and feebler. Dr. Erle sat down near the foot of the bed.

"I have got the instruments for tracheotomy with me," I said.

He shook his head.

"The child is choking," said Sister Marion; "listen to his breathing."

The poor mother uttered a sudden, sharp cry.

"Oh, save him between you—save him. Can't the two of you just save this one little life?" she pleaded.

"Look here, Mrs. Jenkins," said Sister Marion, "you must go into the other room and lie down; we will call you if the child is worse. He is very weak, but we will keep up his strength. You must not get excited in the room with the child."

"Let her stay," said Dr. Erle suddenly. "Dr. Gifford, I should like to have a word with you on the landing."

I followed him outside, he faced me.

"Why were we not sent for twenty-four hours ago?" he said. "The disease has got well down on to the larynx; it is a very malignant case indeed. The boy cannot stand another dose of the anti-toxin. We shall know within an hour whether it is to be life or death."

I felt myself staggering against the dirty wall. Dr. Erle held out his hand and drew me away.

"Don't," he said; "the filth on these walls is so repulsive. But what is the matter? How white you are! Have not you strength enough yet to attend a hopeless case?"

"But this means so much," I said; "the mother's life is bound up in that of the child's, and for myself, it is failure or success. Cannot we do something to save him?"

I then briefly related what had occurred with regard to Dr. Congleton.

"The brute has the boy's death at his door," said Dr. Erle.

A savage expression filled his eyes. I saw him clench his right hand.

"The man is such a bully," he continued, "that the people here are positively afraid of him; he rules them by brute force. But we must get rid of him somehow, Dr. Gifford; he is not a proper practitioner, and it is unnecessary to have scruples in the matter."

"What is the use of his going after the mischief is done," I could not help answering. "The child will die, and as long as they live, the poor people round here will believe that I have caused his death."

"You must live above public opinion," he answered, and then the fierce light went out of his eyes and one of strong sympathy filled them.

"After all take comfort," he said; "these little ones go away to a better and stronger and cleaner life. I know it is heart-breaking for the parents, but there is the bright side. Yes, I believe it firmly; to every early death like this, there is the very bright side. Ah, here comes the father. How do you do, Jenkins? I am sorry to find your child so ill."

"He is that, sir, and it's took us all of a 'eap, for Dr. Congleton said there was nothing much the matter—a touch of bronchitis, no more."

"Dr. Congleton told you a lie; the boy has had diphtheria for several days."

Jenkins's face became white.

"Well, I'm glad to see you, Dr. Erle; I don't 'old with women doctors, though the lydy done her best; but you'll pull the little chap round between yer, doctor?"

"That's just it; you ought to be prepared, and so ought your wife. The case is practically hopeless."

"You don't say so?" Jenkins took a step backwards. "Then the lydy has pisened him."

"Poisoned him? What do you mean? If Dr. Gifford had been called in yesterday morning, and had injected the anti-toxin, the child would in all probability have been out of danger now; as it is——"

"Oh, that's the way the wind blows," said the man; "you take her part. Well, I won't say nothing more at present; and you think the little chap's about to go?"

"Yes."

"Pore little Jim, he wor that 'earty a week back, I can't think how he got it. So proud of runnin' by my side when I wor taking some cheers back to Dickinson. Dickinson give me a good order, and I was quite flush. The young 'un said to me, 'Dad, I'll be a furniture-maker too, and I'll make cheers; but I'll put on a prettier leather than you do, dad.' Oh, he wor a knowing kid. You don't mean to say that you *can't* save him? Why, the lydy she spoke up as spirited as you please and said she could."

"We might have saved him twenty-four hours back. The child has been neglected, and the remedy which could have arrested the complaint was not used in time.

I am sorry for you, Jenkins, but I cannot conceal the truth."

The doctor was about to add something further, but Sister Marion's voice inside the room was heard calling us. We hurried back. The boy was making desperate efforts to breathe.

"We must perform tracheotomy immediately," I said, but Dr. Erle shook his head.

"It would only cause needless suffering and not give relief," he said. "The membrane has spread too low in the larynx for it to be possible to get below it with the tracheotomy tube. Yes, it is a hard case."

He bent over the little fellow as he spoke and felt the tiny wrist.

"Call the mother quick and also the father," said the doctor.

I went on to the landing and summoned them; they both entered. The child looked imploringly first at his mother then at his father. The man bent down over him.

"Look you here, Jimmy," he whispered, "I'll do the cheers your way in future."

The words and their meaning penetrated to the little brain, which was already dulled through the action of the virulent poison; the ghost of a smile flitted across the suffering face, and with it the anguished spirit took its departure.



CHAPTER XXIII

THIS TROUBLESOME WORLD



DID all that was possible for Mrs. Jenkins. For a long time she was in strong hysterics, but towards morning she got calmer, and dropped into a troubled sleep. Leaving her in Sister Marion's care, I hurried home. A few people were already out in the streets, and the news of Jimmy's death had reached them. They scowled at me and muttered as I passed, and one or two hissed. I entered the hospital, went straight to my own room, and gave vent to the first hearty fit of crying I had indulged in for many a day. The suffering and terrible death of the child who had been murdered by the man who had not a doctor's full qualifications upset me terribly. I felt, too, that I should now have a very severe fight to uphold my influence in the place. I was dead tired and weary. Finally I undressed, fell asleep immediately, and after a couple of hours awoke refreshed, and determined not to give way even in a losing game. I went at an early hour to see Dr. Erle.

"I am on my way to Brixton," I said. "I have an old patient there who requires advice. I have come to

know if you will take the dispensary for a couple of hours this morning?"

"Certainly," he replied. He was standing by the window, his face was white, and I noticed that he caught his breath as if it pained him.

"What is the matter?" I said; "you look ill yourself."

"I suffer at times," he answered. "It is only physical." He gave me a wonderfully bright smile, motioned me to a chair, and took one himself.

"This is the second time that you have told me that you suffer," I said, after a pause. "Will you tell me what this really means?"

I felt that my voice was shaking, and the trouble which filled me must have shone in my eyes. He looked full at me, and the smile went out of his own face. It became very grave and troubled.

"I will tell you," he said. "I suffer from aneurism of the descending aorta."

I heard the words quite distinctly, but for a moment I did not reply. The whole room seemed to have got dark, and I knew that my face was cold.

"It is an old trouble," he continued. "Sometimes the pain in the chest and between the shoulders is very severe. This is especially the case after exertion. Also my left arm and hand are much swollen. I have just the usual symptoms—the breathlessness and all the rest. You know the complaint?"

"I have never come across a bad case of aneurism before," I replied. "How long——"

"How long have I had it?" he answered; "for the last two years."

"And you knew of this when you came to Hoxton?"

"Yes; I knew of it some time before I passed my final."

"And knowing it, you elected to come here?"

"Yes."

"Surely from the health point of view you could scarcely have done a worse thing?"

He stood up.

"Perhaps so," he replied; "but I am not affected by that aspect of the case. It is impossible for me to live long, and my most earnest wish is to die in harness. Now let us talk of something else."

But I had received a blow, the magnitude of which I could not all at once realise. I was incapable of speech. Suddenly I jumped up and walked to the window.

"You feel this very much, Miss Gifford," said Dr. Erle; his own voice shook.

I could not reply. After a time my composure returned, and I went back to my chair. He held out his hand. I put mine into it. My one desire just then was not to burst into tears. I wanted to emulate his courage. If he did not falter, neither would I.

"I have told you, and it is a relief," he said, after a pause. "I always felt I should have your sympathy, your—" he looked as if he meant to say more, but refrained.

"Do not take this too much to heart," he said, after a pause; "when the time comes you will be prepared, and the time may be distant—I mean it may not come for another year, or even two years. I am sorry that you got the truth from me this morning, when you are so downcast on account of other matters."

"Oh, they are nothing, they do not signify at all," I managed to say.

"Yes, they do; there will be false reports circulated with regard to you."

"Let them come, it does not matter in the least."

"Anything matters that lessens your influence here; you will see that presently. I shall make it my business to set those reports straight. I am, as you may have perceived, fairly popular myself. People are cruel to women, just because they suspect weakness in them. Now you are not weak at all, and they will soon learn your strength. The moment they realise it they will respect you. Don't lose heart. Liz Pratt, Ann Spicer, and many others would uphold you through any evil report. Go now and enjoy the purer air of a more civilised part of the world. I will look after all your patients to-day, the hospital and everything else. Remember that whatever Congleton may say—and naturally he will use this matter as a handle against you—right must triumph in the end."

He stood up and held out his hand; I laid mine in it. He gave it a grip of great strength, and a moment later I was on my way to Brixton.

During that short journey I lived through the darkest hour of my life. I asked myself what was the matter, and at first I could find no answer. The simple fact that a good man and true, a brave man in every sense of the word, was about to die, that a year or two longer at most would see the end of a brilliant career, did not answer my question. This would be a trouble to many, and to me in particular, for John Erle and I were good friends; but the pain at my heart, the overwhelming

sense of personal loss, could not be accounted for by anything so comparatively commonplace as the loss of a friend. No ; mine was a greater pain, a more overwhelming sorrow. I determined to face the thing. The fact was abundantly plain. I, who had eschewed all thoughts of love and marriage, who had determined to lead a life of single devotedness to the profession which I had adopted, found that I was after all but a woman. The curtain was torn away from my eyes, and I saw myself as I was. When John Erle died there would be a blank in my life which could never be filled by any one else. Yes, I loved him, and to love with me was no light matter. In this first moment of absolute desolation I did not even ask myself if my love was returned ; that question must assuredly face me later on, but now I could only think of the man himself. There might have been better, and braver, and stronger men in the world than John Erle, but if there were, I had not met them. His personality filled my horizon ; the singleness of his aim inspired my respect ; the nobleness of his nature helped to raise my own ; even that spiritual element which I had but dimly understood up to the present, gave to him that subtle sense of mystery which bound my heart captive to his.

"After all," I said to myself, "what is the use of trying to do good ? The world is a hard and hollow place. When he dies I won't stay at Hoxton ; I shall go away by myself ; I shall shut out the world, which has treated me so cruelly. Why should he die, and worse men live ? He is doing a splendid work ; he is helping to raise the poor, the outcast, the miserable, both temporally and spiritually. A man like Dr. Congleton remains

in perfect health. The brute force in him is not subdued by any physical labour. A man like Dr. Erle, sensitive to his finger tips, all spirit, all fire, is called out of the world before his work is well begun. The whole system of the universe is dark and unfair. I will cease to try to make it better."

At this stage my emotions became too much for me. I hastily got out of the tramcar, and seeing Kennington Park not far off, went into it. I stayed there for an hour or two battling with my sorrow. Had I been asked to sum up my own character I should have said—I am thoroughly self-reliant; I never look up to any one; I am not prone to make idols; there are certain people whom I respect, but I should never allow their influence to unduly dominate me. And now I found that instead of this proud and steadfast character I was in reality as weak as any other woman. My profession did not satisfy me; the cause of suffering humanity was not all-sufficient; I wanted just what my sisters, the simplest, the least self-reliant in the world required, a stronger nature than my own to lean on. Yes, I saw myself as I was. I loved Dr. Erle, and he was leaving the world. No wonder I was crushed. I also knew that the sorrow was altogether mine, not his. Death for one like him was but the gateway into a fuller and a more perfect existence. From time to time during our acquaintance he had been fond of talking about the future which lay before all those who are truly the sons of God. As he did so there would come a light into his eyes, and an expression of triumph round his thin lips, which for the time transformed him.

"We fight against the world, the flesh, and the

devil," he used to say, "and in GOD's strength we conquer."

It was because of this hidden strength, the strength of one who leans on God, that he had the strange power which undoubtedly he possessed. Now if Dr. Erle had more or less of the heavenly in him, I had more than less of the earthly. I was so crushed by the present aspect of things, that the people in Nile Street, the dead boy whom I had left only that morning, the mother in her broken-hearted grief, were all as nothing to me. Even Elsie was as nothing just then. The whole world looked black and sorrowful, because my friend had received his summons and was going away.

When I arrived at Miletia Mansion I was neither looking nor feeling my best. Mrs. Tomlinson came out to meet me.

"There," she said, "I thought that was your ring. Come in, do; we're right glad to see you. Why do you make yourself such a stranger? I have had all the place fresh painted and papered; what do you think of it? Light papers I've put up now, it was Elsie's wish; and I've taken down some of those many heavy curtains, and put up light muslin ones—that was Elsie's wish again. Oh, but it's good for sore eyes to see you, that it is." Here she bent forward and gave me a hearty smack on my cheek.

"Come in, dear, it's welcome you are as flowers in May. Elsie will be nearly off her head to see you."

Taking my hand in her plump one the good woman led me down the hall and into a sitting-room at the farther end. The day was a bright one in early May, very much like the day a year ago when I had first

visited Elsie. The flowers were out again in the garden in the square, and the trees were putting on their first fresh emerald green. There was a breath of spring too in the air which I had not breathed at Hoxton. But the most remarkable change in the state of things was the open window. Mrs. Tomlinson glanced at it as soon as ever we came into the room.

"Ay," she said, "that's your doing. You put it to us so forcible last year that we might have lost the child just because we were smothering her, that I endured colds and the risk of bronchitis through the entire winter and spring on purpose to please you. I'd like to know what a woman could do more. But here you are, and here you'll stay for some hours. Papa gave me the most positive injunctions that I wasn't to let you budge, whatever happened, until he came home. But there, what an old goose I am, forgetting that it's Elsie you want to see more than anybody else. I'll ring the bell."

She went over to the mantelpiece, pressed the electric bell, and waited until Adolphus appeared.

"Go up at once, Dolph, and find Miss Elsie," said the good woman. "Tell her Dr. Gifford is below. That'll bring her to her feet if anything will."

The man retired, and in an incredibly short space of time footsteps came flying along the passage, and Elsie in a pretty spring dress entered the room. She ran up to me, clasped her arms round my neck, kissed me once or twice, and then sat down quietly by my side.

She was not looking ill; she had none of the appearance which she had worn a year ago. There was colour

in her cheeks, and plenty of firmness and go about her little figure. She was very pretty too, prettier than I had ever seen her before. She had the delicate, soft loveliness of a moss rose; her skin was like velvet, the colour faint, but most delicately put on. Her dark hair was in perfect contrast to her clear complexion. It was naturally wavy, and grew low on her pretty brow. Elsie's hand held mine; she leant up against me and gave a brief sigh of content.

"There, Elsie darling, I know what you want," said the mother; "just to be left alone with our good doctor. Yes, you shall have her to yourself. But first of all, Dr. Gifford, what will you take to eat? You have had a long ride from Hoxton to this place; you must have a glass of port wine and a bit of seed-cake. I'll ring for Dolph."

"No, I could not touch food," I answered. "I shall be very glad to have lunch whenever it is ready; I could not take anything sooner."

"Ay, that's the way; you half starve yourself. Well, have your way. There, child," turning to her daughter, "it's good to see your eyes beam as they do now. Take her away with you, Elsie, for a good long chat, 'a haver,' my mother, who was a Scotchwoman, would have called it. Now then, off you go."

Elsie took my hand; we went upstairs and into a pretty little sitting-room which opened out of her bedroom.

"You don't look very well yourself, Dr. Gifford," said Elsie; "is there anything wrong?"

Nothing could be more gentle nor sweetly sympathetic than her words, but I started away from her. I could give sympathy just then, but could not receive it.

"I have gone through an anxious time," I said; "don't let us talk about me or my sorrows. How very nice this room is, Elsie; you had not anything like this when I saw you last."

"No; father gave me this charming little room as a Christmas present; he had it furnished on purpose. Isn't the paper pretty? and aren't those curtains sweet? They are Liberty silk; father chose them for me. But these pictures I chose, and all those books too; I value the books more than anything else in the room."

She took me to the little oak bookcase, and I saw a complete set of Ruskin's works, Green's History of England, and different volumes of the poets, all bound in calf.

"Excellent!" I cried; "you ought not to pine on such healthy reading as is to be found here."

She did not reply, but stood languidly by, her eyes lowered.

"What is the matter with you, Elsie? Come, out with it," I said.

I sat down on the nearest ottoman, facing the light. I drew the child down to a place by my side.

"Come," I said; "I have not travelled all this way only to see downcast looks. You are strong in body too. What is it? Let me feel your pulse."

I took her wrist between my finger and thumb. Her pulse was not quite satisfactory. It was slightly intermittent. I now insisted on her raising her eyes, —I looked into their depths. They wore an anxious expression. There seemed to be something furtive about them. They glanced away as if they could not bear a keen scrutiny.

As I looked at her my heart gave a sudden leap of fear, and I forgot my own trouble in keen anxiety on her account. She was far more ill and more upset in nerves than I had expected.

"What is the matter with you?" I said. "Unburden yourself."

"I cannot," she answered. "I wish I could, but I cannot."

She covered her face with her trembling hands.

"But, my dear child, there is no cannot in the matter. You simply must. I have come here for the express purpose. You wanted to see me, did you not?"

"I did," she replied; "and I hoped, I cannot tell what, from your visit. When father told me yesterday evening that you were coming, I could not sleep for excitement and hope. I thought to myself, if there is one person who can really help me it is Dr. Gifford. But when I came downstairs just now and saw your face, the hope died away. Even you, doctor, can do nothing. I am doomed."

"To what, my dear child? How you tremble. What is the matter?"

"Oh, there is a dark shadow over me. It comes nearer every day. I see it. I feel it. It is bad in the daytime, but it is worse at night. Dr. Gifford, look at me."

I glanced at her, but the next moment she uttered a shriek, and covered her face with her hands.

"I am going mad," she said, in a dreary voice. "Yes, yes, I feel it coming nearer and nearer. I shall be a mad woman before a month is out."

"Nonsense, Elsie," I said sternly. "Don't talk such folly."

"It is true. Don't you suppose that I suffer? It was my body last year, and I thought that bad enough, but oh, that was heaven, heaven itself to this agony of mind. It is worse at night. At night if I had poison near I should assuredly take it. Oh, why was I ever born? Dr. Gifford, I have reason for my fears. I have discovered lately that there is madness in my father's family. An aunt of mine is now living in an asylum, and the disease appeared also in farther back generations. Oh, why did my father marry? I have been doomed from my birth. How terrible this all is."

"Listen to me, Elsie," I said firmly. "Your nerves are very much deranged, but as to your going mad, that is folly. People who are mad know nothing whatever about it. They do not think themselves mad. They think, on the contrary, that they are sane, and all the rest of the world mad. My dear child, you must not encourage these unhealthy fears. They make your life a burden. There is nothing wrong with your brain as yet. It is true that your nerves are out of order."

"That is the first stage," she replied. "Oh, I have studied the subject. I have even read books upon it. I am the victim of heredity. What can I do?"

"You must leave that question alone, Elsie. Whether it was right for your father to marry or not cannot enter into our present calculations. My impression is that there is too much made of this heredity business. Your sanity or insanity remains more or less in your own keeping. Do certain things, lead a life of self-restraint, and you have nothing to fear from the fact that you have an aunt in an asylum. In all probability

she is only there because she frittered away her nervous strength on inanities. You must not do so."

"But you do not understand," she continued. "It is the night that is so fearful. I have very little to do—as little as ever—and I have such abundance of time for thinking. Oh, why is father rich? Oh, how I hate money; how I envy the servants here! If it were not for mother, I declare I'd get up and do the work myself; I long to make myself physically tired. Then we have very few friends, at least no friends that suit me. There are some of mother's old cronies, such terribly vulgar people, and the sons and daughters, who have not my tastes. Oh, it is all too appalling. How I wish we were poor!"

"Elsie, my dear, you must have relief. I am glad I have come here. I am sure I can soon make matters better for you. You are suffering from misery of mind just as you did last year from misery of body, because you are without occupation. The want of occupation is the hardest work of all."

"Oh, isn't it?" she cried, clasping and unclasping her hands. "If only I could get tired out with work, if only I could get so tired that I should drop off to sleep from sheer physical exhaustion, I might be able to live. Do you know, there are times when I have thoughts of doing something desperate, stealing something in order to be put in prison that I might have hard labour. You cannot imagine what I suffer."

"But have you never told your mother?"

"Told mother? Do you think she would understand? She does gloat so over her riches; and then, you know, she is not like me; she has occupation, she is busy in

the house, she superintends everything. I wonder poor Adolph stays, she makes such a fuss about the silver and glass; and as to the cook, she changes her every second month, and mother and the cook are always quarrelling. Mother wants things cooked this way, and cook wants them done another, and there is a great deal of excitement. Father has his work in the city. I am the poor, miserable victim. O Dr. Gifford, save me if you can; but there, you cannot, I know you cannot."

"I intend to save you, Elsie, that is, if occupation will do it. You must come back with me to Hoxton."

"Back with you to Hoxton? What do you mean?"

"Yes, you must come with me, and to-night too. You shall sleep in my room for the present; I can put up a little bed for you. You shall come with me when I visit the sick and the poor. You shall see people whose miseries are much greater than yours. You shall also work amongst them; you shall go into dangerous places, for what is a little physical danger compared to what you are suffering. You shall be one of our workers; your bright face, your sweet manner, the wealth which you despise, shall all come in for splendid use. Oh, you shall be a happy girl yet; you will feel that you are put into the world to do a grand work. I am going to settle it all. Stay here now, I will go down and speak to your mother."



CHAPTER XXIV

A MEDICAL OPINION



I STOOD up as I spoke. Elsie gazed at me, and gradually as she did so a light broke over her sweet and expressive face; it shone in her eyes and trembled round her lips. She sprang to her feet, caught both my hands, squeezed them so hard that I felt as if I must cry out with the pain, and then said in a low, ecstatic voice, "Oh, you are an angel, you are an angel! This will, this *must* save me!"

"Now, keep quite quiet and calm," I said. "Don't fret yourself in any way, leave the matter in my hands. You had better stay here and amuse yourself with one of Ruskin's books until I return."

I left the room at once, went down one of the long, thickly-carpeted passages, looked as I passed at the different tokens of the wealth which was gradually crushing the life out of poor Elsie, and sought her mother in the little boudoir downstairs.

Mrs. Tomlinson was waiting for me. She looked anxiously up when I entered the room.

"Well," she said, "what is it, doctor? Have you got to the bottom of the mystery?"

"I have," I answered; "it is the old story."

"But, good gracious me, what do you mean? I am sure the child has variety enough now; and as to air, the place is almost unfit to live in with draughts; and I took down all those beautiful velvet curtains, and put up these wishy-washy things just because you ordered it last year for Elsie, and Elsie wished for it, and there's not a thing we wouldn't give her. Her bicycle—she had one, but she didn't care for it, and neither did I. And her father said he would order a little pony-carriage for her to drive out, but she didn't take any interest in it; and she has her bit of garden, and friends whenever she likes to ask them—I will say she never does ask them, but that's not our fault, is it? And her father promises to take her to Switzerland in the summer. She's that to look forward to. What could a girl want more?"

"Some girls can want more, and must have more, if they are to be well," I answered. "You are trying to make that child, with her sensitive nature, her strong affections, live upon sugar instead of wholesome diet. Oh, I do not mean physically, I mean mentally. Elsie wants to have some of the roughnesses of life; she hates all this padded existence. Mrs. Tomlinson, she cannot live on it, it is impossible."

"Now your talk is altogether beyond me," said Mrs. Tomlinson. "I am very fond of you, for you did save the child when she was at death's door; but she is well enough now in body, and has plenty of colour in her cheeks; it is only the miserable gloom of the creature, never a smile out of her, and sighs fit to break your heart. Once or twice at night I have had fearful

dreams about her, and I have woken up and gone into her room, and found her, if you'll believe me, pacing up and down, looking quite wild; and once she screamed out when she saw me, 'Leave me, mother, leave me.' I declare I fled the room, the expression on her face was so terrible."

"Mrs. Tomlinson," I said, "there is only one thing to be done."

"What is that, Dr. Gifford? I am sure you look grave and serious now. Do you think badly of our Elsie?"

"I do, but I am also firmly convinced that I can save her. I tell you frankly, however, that I have not come one hour too soon."

"Now this is coming to the point; you'll speak to Ben when he comes home?"

"When does your husband return?"

"He is sure to be early to-day on account of your being here. I should not be a bit surprised if he dropped in to lunch. You see he hasn't too much to do in the city nowadays, he has almost made his pile. He need never give himself an hour's work if it wasn't that he likes the occupation."

"Ah! there it is," I answered; "your husband likes to work, and so do you, and yet you expect your poor little girl to live without any occupation."

"Occupation!" cried Mrs. Tomlinson; "but what is to prevent her having plenty of occupation? Isn't she free to walk and ride, and have her friends, and amuse herself from morning till night?"

"But what if she doesn't wish to amuse herself? You see you and your husband are very rich, but he likes

to keep his work in the city, and you like to keep your work in the house."

"Me?" said Mrs. Tomlinson; "like to keep my work! Haven't I servants—Dolph to wait at table, and a boy under him, and three housemaids and a cook, and a kitchen-maid; what work is there left for me?"

"Plenty, for you do not allow these servants of yours to do their work without superintending them. Elsie is the victim; she feels it herself; she must have work, hard work at once."

"Oh, good gracious! what do you mean? Our child, for whom we have toiled, and saved, and dreamed dreams about, set to do menial work!"

"I will explain more when your husband comes in. Now tell me about yourself. You look worried too, are you quite well?"

"Oh yes, my dear, pretty well, if it were not for the fretting about Elsie, and the seeing her gloom; but I do suffer now and then from the rheumatics; and I believe I have got incipient gout."

"Do you take enough exercise?"

"Pretty well; I'm up and down stairs a good bit, but I have lost my walking powers. I used to be able to walk my three and four miles a day when I had all the marketing to bring in myself. Ah, I was healthy in those days."

"You don't look so well as you did last year. You ought to take more exercise. Oh, believe me, there are special diseases which attack the rich. Things are far more even in this old world of ours than any one thinks. You are suffering from too much money, Mrs. Tomlinson. Your husband, to a certain extent, suffers

from the same complaint, but Elsie is the worst victim."

"You always were very odd, my dear, not the least like the ordinary doctor."

"And there is another point," I continued. "Why in the name of all that's sensible have you forbidden the child to read novels?"

Mrs. Tomlinson became very red, and an excited gleam shone in her eyes.

"Oh dear, dear!" she exclaimed. "Now, Dr. Gifford, I respect you very much. I believe that you are a clever doctor; you thoroughly understand the mechanism of the body, but when it comes to the mechanism of the soul, there, my dear child, you must allow an older woman to have her own opinion. I'd rather Elsie had a good bit of a fret and a dull hour now and then, and a melancholy mind, than that she should go in for dram-drinking."

"That is not your own expression," I said boldly; "you could never have invented it; and it is not true. I don't want her to read bad novels—there are unfortunately too many, and I hope she will never look at them; but there are also good novels, excellent for amusing the mind, and keeping it healthily occupied. But I think I hear Mr. Tomlinson's voice."

"To be sure, so it is. Now that's lucky; I'll go at once and tell him you are here. We will have a good chat over the matter, and you'll tell us what's in the bottom of your mind."

The good woman waddled out of the room, returning presently with her husband, who looked very thin and cadaverous. He shook hands, however, warmly with

me, then glanced at his wife in an apprehensive way, and said abruptly—

“Well, Dr. Gifford, what is it? What news have you? You’ve seen the child?”

“I have,” I replied gravely. “I want to speak very seriously to you and Mrs. Tomlinson.”

“I knew you would come to the point, that’s the comfort of a sensible woman.” He stood by the open window looking down at his wife and me.

“Now then,” he said, “let’s have it out.”

“I have talked to Elsie,” I replied, “and drawn some of the truth out of her. A year ago she suffered from terrible nerve failure, but it then took a bodily direction; she is suffering now also from nerve collapse, but on this occasion it has reached the higher centres, and affected that portion of her brain which rules her mind. Her brain is not sufficiently nourished, and there are certain tissues altogether out of order. There is no doubt whatever that she has a natural tendency in that direction, and the want of occupation and ceaseless brooding over herself have brought matters to a crisis. In short, Mr. Tomlinson, your child’s mind is in a dangerous condition.”

“You don’t mean to tell me,” said Tomlinson, advancing a step or two, “that the child is going out of her mind? Oh, my God! you recall my sister to me; she went mad when she was thirty; you don’t apprehend that with Elsie?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“You do! God help her!”

I stood up.

“Don’t be too down-hearted,” I said; “at present

matters are not so serious that the danger cannot be averted. The thing you dread may never be; there is no active disease at present, but the seeds are laid. It would only require a sudden shock, any little *contre-temps* of a specially irritating character, to fire the mine, and then, Mr. Tomlinson, there will be a wreck, the wreck of a noble and a beautiful nature. The child must be saved, and by strong means."

My words were so forcible that even Mrs. Tomlinson was silenced. She leant back against the soft pillows of the luxurious chair in which she had placed herself, and wiped the moisture from her forehead.

Mr. Tomlinson spoke.

"We will do anything you wish," he said, in a low, frightened voice; "we never guessed it was as bad as this. Poor little Elsie!"

"We must be very cautious how we work," I said; "and above all things, neither you nor your wife must show Elsie the least vestige of alarm. I have told her what I believe to be the truth, that she is not going out of her mind; nor is she at present. What I tell you is that her nerve centres are in a highly dangerous condition, and that a very little would cause the balance to run down the wrong way. Were such a thing to be the case, with a nature like hers total recovery would be almost hopeless. She would in all probability be a lunatic to her dying day."

"But the remedy?" said Mr. Tomlinson.

"As the case is severe, the remedy must also be stringent," I answered. "Now, Mr. Tomlinson, I want to save your child, and I believe the way to do it will be to take her straight away from her mother

and you. She has taken a morbid hatred to riches; let her do without them for the present; let her go back to the more primitive existence in which she used to live when she was young. She was healthy and happy then."

Mrs. Tomlinson began to interrupt, but Tomlinson held up his hand.

"Let the doctor have her say out, then we can speak," he said.

He looked at his wife as he said the words, read the misery in her face, and laid his hand not unkindly on her shoulder.

"Go on, doctor, we are all attention," he continued.

"I want to take Elsie back with me to Hoxton to-day," I said. "I live in a small hospital there; I wait on sick people all day, people who are sick in body, very sore and weary, very poor, very hopeless. I want Elsie to see these people, who are none of them suffering from nervous depression, but from acute bodily suffering. I want her in watching them and attending them and helping them to forget herself. The cure lies in those last words. When she forgets herself she will be well, quite well."

"'Pon my word! there's something in it," said Mr. Tomlinson.

"But, Ben, you can't mean to allow it," cried the wife. "Why now, just listen to me, I've got a much better plan. Let Ben give up his business and take the girl right away for a big travelling tour."

"I would recommend that," I answered, "were the case not so bad, but in Elsie's situation it is not sufficient. She will remember herself even when she is at *table*

d'hôte with other people; she will remember herself when she lies down to rest in the best rooms of the best hotels; she will feel the awful loneliness of her own misery when she is in the great mountain scenery in Switzerland. No, no, it won't do. Her mind wants to be braced. The life I intend to give her will be very bracing. If you trust her to me, remember that I do not mean to spare her; I mean to give her lots of occupation, plenty to do. She must come into the slums with me and see the poor; she must see their misery, and feel at last what money is worth. I want you to give her, not at once, but later on, money in order to effect some reforms in that miserable, ugly place. I want you, for instance, to help her to start a convalescent home at the seaside, where the children can go after illness to get back their health. Give her a little money of her own when the time comes, and let her spend it as she in her wisdom will think best; for remember, Elsie has a very high order of mind and a very beautiful body. Hers is a lovely structure altogether. She will do well when she has learned a little more, and then her misery will be forgotten. Now, is it to be Yes or No."

"Well, at least you will undertake that the poor child does not go into infectious places," said Mrs. Tomlinson.

"I will promise you this much," I answered, after a pause, "I will not deliberately send her where there is infection, but she will, and she will know it, run some risk. It would be better, fifty times better, Mrs. Tomlinson, that she died from fever, diphtheria, or typhoid, or anything else contracted at Hoxton, than that she

died in a madhouse. I told you the remedy must be stringent. Are you willing to trust me?"

Mrs. Tomlinson burst into tears.

"To think that we should both have toiled and moiled for this," she said.

"Never mind, Susan," said the husband; "if we save the child, that is the main thing. I think we must trust her to Dr. Gifford. You never saw my poor sister, did you, Susan? Dr. Gifford is right. Elsie must be taught to forget herself—ay, ay, to forget herself, that's the main thing. We must yield to the doctor, Susan; we must make up our minds. It goes sore, but we have to think of Elsie first of all."

I went straight up to Mr. Tomlinson and held out my hand.

"God bless you!" I said; "you are a brave man. Elsie shall have my most constant care; she is my dearest patient; I love her better than any other girl in the world. Yes, I think you may trust her to me."



CHAPTER XXV

THE ANGEL IN 'A' WARD



AFTER lunch that day I had a little talk with Elsie. I spoke in a most matter-of-fact way.

"You are coming with me," I said, "and you must leave all your luxurious life behind you. You must prepare to be dead tired—so sleepy, that you will not remain one moment awake when you lay your head on your pillow. But I want you to bring some pretty dresses with you."

"Pretty dresses?" she answered, opening her eyes in some astonishment. "But will they be of the least use? I thought you would wish me to put on a uniform at once."

"I think not," I answered. "You would not attract any attention if you wore uniform. The people in our district are quite accustomed to seeing the nurse's dress and the sister's dress; but if you wear, not expensive things, no jewellery, of course, of any sort, but neat, pretty shirts, and gaily trimmed hats, with that flower-like face of yours you will make the most pleasant impression. Of course just at first I cannot let you go out alone, so you will be quite safe in your gay things."

Mrs. Tomlinson had come into the room.

"I want you to help us too," I said to her. "It would be the greatest boon, both to Elsie and me, if you sent us every week a large basket of flowers and a hamper of fruit and vegetables. Elsie shall smell the flowers, and she shall have her fair share of the vegetables—the more you can spare, so much the better. And then, besides, Elsie might send her laundry home to be done up. You don't mind during the hot weather giving her plenty of clean shirts and prettily got-up dresses. She will look so fresh and neat if she need not save in that particular, and it will do the people good to look at anything so pretty."

"Upon my word, you're an excellent creature," said Mrs. Tomlinson, and she appeared more cheered by the thought of the flowers and vegetables, and the pretty garments for her daughter, than I could have thought possible when I saw her grief an hour or two back.

Accordingly two small trunks were packed, and I myself superintended the wardrobe which Elsie took with her.

"That blue muslin," I said, "is exactly like corn-flowers in colour. Be sure you put it in."

"But it is my last pretty garden-party dress. Do you think I'll want it at Hoxton?"

"You certainly will. You must wear it to church on Sundays. I believe it will do a world of good, and preach a sermon in its own way."

She laughed. I had not heard her laugh before.

"And that hat," I continued, "trimmed with corn-flowers, it must go in to match the dress."

I chose a pink muslin as well. The hat to match that was trimmed with wild roses; and also two or three white dresses, and, of course, some more serviceable garments.

Between three and four that day Elsie and I left Miletia Mansion and went to Hoxton. In order to satisfy Mrs. Tomlinson, and also because I believed it would make a good impression, we went to Elsie's new home in a carriage. By doing so she could bring all her belongings with her; I did not mean to give her too much discomfort at once.

We reached Hoxton about five o'clock. Just as we drew up at the hospital I saw Dr. Erle coming down the steps. The expression on his face was just as usual. He glanced at Elsie in some surprise, and then came up to me.

"Let me introduce you to Miss Tomlinson," I cried. "She is a patient of mine and I am bringing her to Hoxton for change of air."

He looked at Elsie again. Doubtless a prettier vision had not met his eye for many a day. One of his quick, penetrating looks must have told him that there was more here than met the eye. He gave her a courteous and hearty welcome.

"You will have plenty to do in the hospital," he said. "You will be taken a good bit out of yourself, that is, if our good doctor allows you to help her."

"To help me!" I cried. "Elsie is to be my right hand. But is there anything fresh the matter, Dr. Erle? How about the dispensary, and——"

My old troubles, those I thought so great yesterday, returned to me in full magnitude. I was almost glad of

this. They would help me to bear a keener grief without flinching.

"It is poor Mary Dean," he said. "She has gone through a day of awful suffering. I should not be surprised if she died before morning."

"Have you given her morphia?"

"Yes, but not quite as much as usual. Her heart has become seriously affected. Oh, she will bear up. She is the bravest soul I ever met. I will return again in the evening to see her. She has been crying out for you."

I took Elsie into the house. Sister Marion met us. She also was full of distress about Mary Dean.

Elsie shrank back, looking pale and frightened.

"Come, Elsie," I said, "your work begins at once. As soon as you have had tea I shall put you on duty."

"Oh, but——" said Elsie.

"Don't you want to forget yourself?" I said a little sternly. "In this house nervous fancies have no room to grow. Come, come, be brave; you have put your hand to the plough, and you cannot look back."

"Oh, I will be brave," she said, the colour of resolve coming into her cheeks.

I called Sister Marion to me and gave her a few directions. I also gave her a very slight *résumé* of Elsie's case.

"Don't spare her," I said to the nurse; "give her plenty to do. In the meantime have a little bed put up in my room. She can sleep in my bed to-night, and I will have the camp bed. And now, please, ask the servant to bring tea in as soon as possible. Elsie must have plenty

to eat and plenty to do, and she will soon be a different creature."

When I entered the sitting-room Elsie was standing looking out of the window. There was a dazed, despairing kind of look in her face; her misery and agitation were more apparent even than I had seen them in Miletia Mansion.

"O Dr. Gifford!" she said, running up to me, "has the carriage gone yet?"

"Yes, dear, a quarter of an hour ago."

"Then I must remain here for to-night, but I don't think I can stand it any longer, it is so ugly, so hideous."

"In your early days, Elsie, you did not live in a pretty place."

"That is true, but my eyes have got accustomed to beauty since then. I never saw anything like this; I cannot remain, I must go home."

"I am afraid you will have to spend the night here now; I am sorry, but it cannot be helped. We have a very anxious case in A ward, and I must attend to it immediately. Ah, here comes tea. You will help me this night at least, Elsie?"

"If you wish it, and if you think I can," said the poor child.

Elsie sat down; I poured out a cup for her. At first she refused to take it, but I insisted.

"Come," I said, "you must be quick; I cannot pet you now that you are here, for I shall be much too busy. Drink off your tea and eat this bread and butter. We will have supper between nine and ten o'clock."

"Supper! not dinner?" said Elsie.

"No, supper—cold meat, cheese, and beer. If you like milk better you shall have it."

"I don't think I could touch either cheese or beer," said the spoiled child, with a shudder.

"Well, never mind; when supper time comes I dare say you will think differently; but if you don't like beer, there is always milk. Now then, have you finished?"

"I think so."

I glanced at her. She was dressed neatly and very quietly in grey. Her dress fitted to perfection; it was soft, and made no sound. Her little face was white, her dark eyes were full of the suppressed emotions which were torturing her whole delicate nervous system.

"Elsie," I said, as an inspiration came to me, "how would you like to play the part of a ministering angel now, and at once?"

"How can I?" she answered.

"Well, come with me, be quick."

I took her into her bedroom.

"Let us unlock this trunk," I said, "or perhaps you will do it yourself, for I am dead tired; I was up the whole of last night, remember."

"Were you really? Oh, how horribly selfish I am!" said Elsie.

She went on her knees with more energy than she had yet shown, unlocked her trunk, and then turned to me.

"Out with that soft white dress," I said.

It was done in a twinkling.

"Now on with it, Elsie; on with it."

She put it on in some astonishment. It was a very simple dress, but beautifully made. It made Elsie look more or less of the angel she really was.

"There is a poor woman in ward A who will in all probability meet her Maker before another sun rises," I said. "I want you to stay with her to-night. You may help her to go through her last sore battle. Think of her, don't think of yourself. Now come with me into the ward."

She shivered, then seemed to brace herself together, and followed me. We entered ward A. It was a dull hour for the sick people, one of the worst in the twenty-four; the evening was setting in, and night with its terrors was nearly upon them. There was a girl in an advanced stage of consumption, half sitting, half leaning up against the wall, in a bed which was in a recess near one of the windows. This girl had large and lovely eyes, each feature was beautiful and exquisitely proportioned, but there was a look of mortal fear on her face sad to see. She knew that the grip of death was already upon her. I took Elsie straight up to her.

"Hester," I said, "this is my dear little friend Elsie Tomlinson. You may call her Elsie if you like, she is going to spend to-night in this ward. I am quite sure her presence here will help you all. Poor Hester, you are suffering, I fear?"

"Yes, doctor," panted the poor girl, "the breathlessness gets so bad." Then she stopped speaking and looked full at Elsie. Elsie bent forward and took one of her hands.

"I am very sorry for you," she said.

The tears came into Hester's big grey eyes. By this time every pair of eyes in the ward were fixed upon the new visitor. Her white dress did not make the slightest noise; there was a daintiness about her, a freshness, a

spirituality, which appealed to each and all. They were so tired, so utterly weary, their future was so hopeless—and here was a beautiful picture, a living picture too, who could speak and move, who could shed beauty wherever she turned.

Elsie's expressive glances, full of sympathy, seemed to penetrate into each corner of the ward. There was a woman dying in a bed opposite one of the windows. Hers was an uninteresting case in itself; she turned round, opened her eyes once, then opened them again and fixed them upon Elsie's face, a smile flitted over her thin lips, she turned away, and began muttering the first words of a hymn she must have learned in, God knows how long ago a time, perhaps at her mother's knee—

“Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing their flight o'er all the earth.”

I heard the words, went up to Elsie, and whispered in her ear, “She thinks you are one of them; play the part, dear; take the part.”

Elsie's eyes filled with sudden tears.

“Oh, how wonderful—how queer I feel!” she said.

“Don't mind how you feel; think of these poor souls, think of their sufferings.”

I then took her to Mary Dean's bedside. Mary was half sitting up, supported by pillows. Her face was of a dead white, almost yellow in hue; there were blue lines round the eyes; the lips were drawn; the ravages of disease and mortal suffering had nearly done their appointed work. Elsie shuddered.

“Don't think of yourself,” I said to her; “I will show you where to sit. When she opens her eyes smile at

her, say a verse of a hymn, any hymn—just comfort her in your own way. Lift up the SAVIOUR'S Cross before her eyes; she is hanging on her own cross, remember. If there is anything you really need, you have only to call one of the nurses; and now, as I am dead tired, and expect to be up most of to-night, I shall lie down for a couple of hours. Sister Marion will share the care of the ward with you, but you in particular are to have charge of Mary Dean."

I almost saw Elsie's lips form the word "Afraid," but the lips never uttered it. She sat down. I left the room. I lay down on my bed without undressing. The moment I laid my head on my pillow, notwithstanding the weight at my heart, I was sound asleep. I was so weary that I did not wake until midnight; then I started up, found myself wide awake on the instant, rose hastily, washed my face and hands, changed my dress, and went on to the landing.

In A ward all was silence. I went into my sitting-room where supper was laid, took some, and went straight into the ward. The night-light was burning in the accustomed corner, and most of the patients were trying to sleep; a very few had succeeded. Sister Marion had just put a screen round Mary Dean's bed. I approached the other side of the screen. The dying woman was still lying with her eyes closed; the drawn look was more apparent on her face, the dark shadow had grown darker; she was murmuring now and then between her partly closed lips—

"The pain, the awful pain." Then she opened her eyes and fixed them on Elsie. "Don't leave me, sweet angel; stay with me to the bitter end."

"Yes, Mary, yes," replied Elsie's voice.

Elsie did not see me. I stood near her, but she was so absorbed, so absolutely and completely lifted out of herself, that she noticed no one but the dying woman.

Mary Dean opened her eyes wide. "You promise that you'll do what I want, kind angel," she said.

"Yes, Mary; how many little children did you say?"

"Two girls and two boys and the little baby bless you, dear, and my poor man himself. You'll visit them your own self; you'll break the news to them, and then you'll come to me."

"Some day, Mary, I'll come to you."

"Don't be long away; I'll be waiting—oh, this awful pain, it burns, it eats into me; oh, this awful pain! But it was so good of God to send you just at the last, so wonderful, I can bear up now. Did you say that you would go yourself and tell the husband and the children?"

"I will go myself," said Elsie.

Mary Dean closed her eyes, a smile flitted across her lips. "You might hold my hand, blessed spirit," she said; "I'll feel you with me as I am being lifted straight up to the Gates of Glory."

Elsie's little slender hand touched the toilworn one of the dying woman; the fingers fluttered in the slight clasp, and then lay still and comforted.

I moved away to the other side of the screen.

"She has been quite off her head for some hours now," said Sister Marion; "she believes that little girl is a real angel sent down to comfort and help her. Nothing could make her death more blessed."



CHAPTER XXVI

FATHER CLINTON



JUST about this time there was seen in Hoxton a man who wore the cowl of a monk and who had the face of an angel. He went in and out amongst the people at all hours, being more often seen, however, in the evening and at midnight and in the small hours of the early morning. He was well known to the men and women workers of the two settlements close by, and I often saw him accompanying Mr. Robson in his visits to the poor. One day I inquired of Dr. Erle if the priest whose face was strange to me was going to take up his quarters in the men's settlement.

"No," he answered; "his name is Clinton, the Rev. Hope Clinton. He is very earnest, and in many ways most eccentric. He is imbued through and through with the strongest tenets of the Christian Socialist, and strange as it may seem, is one of the few men who lives absolutely up to his principles. His people are in a good position, but he has chosen to cast in his lot entirely with the poor and suffering. He believes to the letter that he is his brother's keeper, and that his brother lives in the mass in Hoxton, Plaistow, Barking Road,

Shoreditch, and such neighbourhoods. Many a vicar is glad to have him in his parish, he might be called a sort of universal missionary. Mr. Robson thinks that there are few men like him, and says that he is sure to do a remarkable work, for such whole-hearted enthusiasm cannot but bring results. His preaching is almost an inspiration."

"He has a remarkable face, certainly," I answered; "the eyes are lit from some inward source. That look is marvellous and only given to a few."

I glanced at Dr. Erle as I spoke. He had the same look, not always, but at times. His face was very white to-day, and when I looked at him he turned away as if he were more troubled than he cared to own.

"Clinton has a remarkable face and is a remarkable man," he said abruptly, "and there is so much to be done here now that I hope he will devote himself primarily to us for the next few months. But now, Dr. Gifford, what about your little friend? Do you really mean to send that child in her gay dresses in and out amongst the people of Hoxton?"

"I have such an idea," I answered, "and it may possibly work. She helped Mary Dean through her worst hour."

I then related the incident of Elsie in her white dress, and Mary's impression that an angel had really been sent to guide her across the Valley of Death.

"It was like you to think of it," said Dr. Erle, "and as far as Miss Elsie herself is concerned will probably act as a direct inspiration. What she lived through last night will start the girl on a new tack. As to Mary Dean, poor soul, she has met the Hosts of God long since, and been comforted for the storms through which

she has lived. 'Then are they glad because they are at rest, so He bringeth them unto the haven where they would be.'

"How are the Jenkinses?" I asked. "Have you seen Mrs. Jenkins yet?"

"I went there last night, she is very ill, broken down altogether. I am going round to see her in an hour or so. You had better keep out of the neighbourhood just at present; the man is very sullen, won't talk one way or the other. Congleton has evidently seen him. I shall take Clinton to see Mrs. Jenkins to-morrow, hers is just the case for him. He has the most marvellous power of probing right down to the depths of the heart, and seems to be specially skilful and experienced with people of Jenkins's class."

When I returned to the hospital, I found Elsie standing by a table in our sitting-room. A great basket of flowers had already arrived from Brixton.

"Mother sent these just after you went out this morning," said Elsie, turning round when I entered. "I thought I might take some to the Deans, and I want money, please, to buy some fruit. Which is the nearest fruiterers, Dr. Gifford?"

"There is no fruit just here which would be worth giving," I replied; "but you might go in the tramcar up the City Road."

"How am I to get to the tramcar?"

"Put on that quiet grey dress you wore yesterday, and I will direct you. It would be a good plan to take flowers and fruit to the Dean children, and I will send George round with you after dinner."

"Your man-servant? But can you spare him?"

"Certainly, you are not to go into any of the slums alone at present. I promised your father and mother so much."

"But I must not be a burden on you really, I shall not want any one to come with me a second time, but perhaps just this once."

"Aren't you tired, Elsie? You were up most of the night."

"Just a wee bit, but only pleasantly so."

She did not look as if she meant to speak much, and I determined not to probe her feelings any further. I gave her half a sovereign, and told her to buy what fruit she wanted.

"It was very silly of me," she said as I did so, "to come without my purse, I forgot all about it yesterday, but I have written to mother and she will send me five pounds, I can pay you back then."

"Pay me back when you like," I replied. "Go now and get ready for your expedition."

I sent one of the nurses with her as far as the tram-car. It was the first time for many years that timid little Elsie had been allowed to feel her feet. She came back in the course of an hour and a half with a colour in her cheeks, a light in her eyes, and a quantity of expensive fruit. She had even been extravagant enough to purchase two baskets of early strawberries.

"They only cost three shillings," she said, "and the children will like them. There are two boys and two girls and a baby. I wonder how old they are and how they really live. Do you think it will take any of the sting out of their sorrow when they see all these nice things?"

"They will be interested and pleased I have not the slightest doubt," I replied.

"But won't it be terrible, Dr. Gifford, to witness their grief? What must I say to them? Last night I could not speak at all, except just to say, 'Yes—I will do it.' I could not find my voice to say anything more."

"It was given to you, Elsie," I said in a solemn tone, "to act as a true angel of consolation. Speech was not needed. That poor soul went away happy; you helped her in the agony of her struggle with death; be thankful, be very thankful."

"Yes," she answered, "I am thankful. It is all very strange and solemn. I feel——"

"Don't tell me about your feelings, darling, go bravely on, you are doing splendidly."

I kissed her.

"When may I go to see the children?" she asked restlessly.

"I cannot spare George until after early dinner. By the way, Elsie, you did not take a proper breakfast this morning."

"I wasn't hungry. I don't feel as if I could ever eat again with appetite. I never was so excited in all my life."

"Well, you must make a first-rate dinner, or I shall not give you leave to go to the Deans' this afternoon."

"But, Dr. Gifford, I am quite strong in body."

"I have no time to argue, dear, you cannot live here if you do not eat. There is such a thing as helping the poor in the wrong way. With that kind of treatment I have nothing whatever to do. If you want to really help them in the right way you must first of all be

careful of your own health. You must not wear yourself out, that would be a frightfully selfish thing to do; you would then be a burden to your friends and a trouble instead of a help. You will have plenty of hard work here, and plenty of excitement, and your feelings will often be strained to the utmost, and your nerves will be more or less on tension, therefore to live well you must eat well, and rest well, and sleep well. Dinner will be here in a few moments. Go and wash your hands, and we shall be ready to sit down."

The dinner was plain but wholesome. George waited on us. Elsie began first to eat unwillingly, but soon found that she was hungry. I saw that she took plenty of the plain and wholesome food, and soon afterwards, George carrying the fruit and Elsie the flowers, they started off for the Deans' house.

"I ought to wear black, ought I not?" said the child; "it seems scarcely respectful not to show outward signs of grief."

"But why should you grieve?" I replied, "you might indeed have grieved for the last few months if you had witnessed that long agony, but now the agony is past, and there is no cause for anything but rejoicing. No, wear your present dress, which is neat and suitable, and makes you look a very sweet little girl indeed."

She started off. It was quite late when she and George returned. George looked glum, and as if he could say a good deal if he might. Elsie's face was deadly pale, and there were traces of tears round her eyes.

"O Dr. Gifford," she said, flinging herself into my arms, and bursting into a torrent of tears, "I have done

it, I have told them. The children were the only ones in at first, and I think they were stunned, poor little things, but they seemed comforted a good bit when they saw the fruit, and cheered up a little when I fed them with strawberries turn about. It was when the poor husband came home that the terrible time came. He would not believe me, and bounced out of the room banging the door after him. Then he came back again and begged my pardon, and sat down, and asked me to tell it all over again. I had to tell him every single thing, and when I said that she mistook me for a real angel, he was so overcome that he burst out crying. I had never seen a man cry before, and it was terrible. Then he got calmer, and he began to talk about her; he said there never was such a wife, and that since she had left the house everything had gone to the bad, and he couldn't make his money go far, and there was no one to make him comfortable in the evening, and he had begun to take to bad ways, and had often gone to the Green Dragon, a public-house in a place called Nile Street, and all his savings were gone, and he didn't think the baby was at all well. He said his wife's sister had promised to come and look after the baby, but she hadn't arrived yet. Then he took me up to the cradle, where I had heard a little moan, and he pulled down a coverlet and I saw the baby. O Dr. Gifford, what a sight it was! I don't know much about babies, but I don't believe that little creature can be healthy. It has the tiniest, most miserable little body you ever saw in your life, all skin and bone, loose skin on the tiny little hands, and loose puckered skin on the little old solemn face. I never could believe that a human creature could

look so bad. Dean says it does not weigh ten pounds, he is sure, and yet it is nearly nine months old. It is her little baby, and it must, yes it must, be helped and saved. Dr. Gifford, I want you to let it come here to-night. I have noticed that you have got three cots for quite little children; may the baby have one, and may I look after it?"

"I will speak to Sister Anna," I answered, "she always has charge of the babies. If she has time to-night she will go round and see the child, and if it is really ill, she will bring it here for a fortnight or three weeks."

I left the room, called Sister Anna and spoke to her. She promised to go straight away to the Deans, see the child, and if it was bad enough bring it to the hospital.

"You shall be its nurse, Elsie," I said, returning to my sitting-room; "but not to-night, for to-night you must sleep well in order to be fit for your duties to-morrow. And now I have just been asked to attend a meeting at the Boys' Club in Britannia Street. There is a wonderful man going to address the people; his name is Clinton, he is a clergyman, a priest of the Church of England."

"I have never heard a clergyman of the Church of England speak," said Elsie; "you know father and mother are both Methodists."

"You shall hear a very good man speak to-night, he is full of enthusiasm for his work. I am most anxious to hear him myself. Go and put on your hat, it is time for us to be off."

We went to the hall where the mission was to be held, and for the first time in my life, though by no means the last, I listened to Father Clinton. The place

was crowded to overflowing, and Elsie and I could only just find standing-room near the door. I saw that Elsie was physically very tired, but I resolved to take no notice of that. This very physical fatigue would be good for her mental ailment. In her case I must now and then be cruel to be kind.

I had heard Dr. Erle speak on the very first night I had come to Hoxton, and now I heard Father Clinton, and I knew that both men were not only orators by nature, but that both were possessed by the same burning zeal for the souls of others. The words of the Father contained the seed needed, in the case of Elsie, to sink into a heart already prepared and ready to listen, for he showed her, with a firm, unflinching hand, what life in its fulness really meant. He showed what we, who had opportunities given to us, were meant to do for our brothers who were perishing. He let us peep over the edge of the gulf and look down into the pit into which these brothers and sisters of ours were tumbling day after day. Never before had I realised Death the Destroyer in his true and awful colours. But the preacher had tact as well as power, and when he saw that he had impressed us as he meant to impress us, he turned to the brighter side of the picture. On this side he shed a brilliant light, the light of Love. If Death, the Destroyer, was realised by those who listened, so also was Love, the Restorer. Love could rescue, Love could save. Love had rescued and saved; it had come into our lives when the Saviour of all the world had appeared, and even now, was it not in our midst, coming, as it best could come, through the hands, the hearts, the strength of those fortunate men and women who, having got the

best of this world's goods, resolved to share them with those who have the worst. The grand principle of Christian Socialism was explained by this man, who had acted up to his own teaching. He had cast aside the glory and brightness, the wealth and power which were his by birth, and had thrown in his lot with England's most sorrowful, most cruelly used children.

Towards the close of the address Dr. Erle came and touched my arm.

"You would like to know Father Clinton, would you not?" he said.

"Yes; is there a chance of your being able to introduce him to me?"

"I am coming to that. I am going to accompany him to-night on a midnight mission, are you too tired to come with us?"

"Not a bit," said Elsie's voice suddenly.

"But you are not accustomed to these sort of things," he said, turning and facing her.

"I will come if I may," she replied.

I looked at her and then nodded to the doctor.

"Let her come," I said, "I will see that she has a good long sleep when we return home."

Dr. Erle said that he would meet us with Father Clinton at the hospital about half-past eleven. Elsie and I hurried back.

The Dean baby had already arrived, and was asleep in its little cot in A ward. Elsie and I were ready for Dr. Erle and Father Clinton when they arrived. Father Clinton and I hurried on together. I shall never forget that night; and amongst all the sights which met my eyes, and the terrible pictures which were indelibly

printed on my brain, three stand out with awful distinctness.

The public-houses were closed, and the men and women had poured into the streets. We boldly plunged into Nile Street. Father Clinton in his cowl, with his head thrown back, walked rapidly, and I had some difficulty in keeping up with him.

"Erle has told me about your hospital," he said; "you are doing excellent work here."

"The work is of the deepest interest," I replied; "we do what we can to improve the physical health of this place, which is at present at a very low ebb."

"Your mission is to heal the sick; it is grand work," he replied. "Mine is to keep those who are in health in such a state of decent comfort, that they shall not be tempted to plunge into sin."

"You are wanted in a place of this sort," I replied. "Dr. Erle and I, Mr. Robson, and the Sisters of the Settlement, do what we can; but a man who could come as a direct inspiration——"

"I am interested in Hoxton," he said, interrupting me, "and will stay as long as I can, but I am called in many directions. Everywhere there are the lost, the sin-destroyed, the man-forgotten. You know," he added abruptly, giving me one of his quick glances, "I do not believe in the *God-forgotten*, there is no one on this earth in that plight." Then he continued, "but what has that white-faced child to do in such a scene? You—I can see by your face—are accustomed to it, but she is not."

"That is true," I replied, "but I should like to tell you that of all those who listened to you to-night, there

is no one who needs help more than that little girl. She seeks not only the salvation of others, but her own also here at Hoxton. I have no time now to tell you her story ; she is one of the unfortunate victims of over-civilisation."

"I understand, and she will save herself in helping others ; hers is a beautiful face."

A crowd nearly obstructed the narrow roadway. Father Clinton stood still.

"What is the matter ?" he cried in a voice which was at once deep and powerful ; "we want to go through—make way for us at once, friends."

The crowd opened the moment they heard the voice, and the next moment closed round us. A woman was lying dead drunk in the centre of the roadway.



CHAPTER XXVII

THE MIDNIGHT MISSION



FATHER CLINTON fell on his knees and bent over her.

"Why, this is Mrs. Hichens," he cried in a voice full of grief. "I saw Mrs. Hichens yesterday, and she promised she would never touch anything again. What a downright shame this is! When will people have strength enough to respect their given word?"

His voice grew both stern and hard.

"Only drink ails the woman," he said, looking up at Dr. Erle, who now approached.

"We had better take her out of this," said Erle, "there is no use in the police getting her—not that any policeman would venture down here," he added, his voice sinking to a whisper.

Still Father Clinton remained kneeling. All of a sudden he rose, lifted his head, and looked at the crowd.

"You see this woman," he said; "when she recovers from her drunken bout she will be miserable. I hope to God she will feel fit to kill herself, and yet will realise only too fully that, if she does, she will get into a worse plight. Intense remorse will be her one chance of salva-

tion. Now then, Erle, with your help we will take her indoors. This is a shameful case."

Dr. Erle was just about to stoop to lift the woman from the ground when I stepped forward.

"No," I said, "this is my place." He glanced at me. I saw the colour flush into his cheeks. "I am strong, let me," I pleaded.

Distress filled his eyes. He seemed about to remonstrate, but the next moment stepped back without another word. Father Clinton stooped and raised the drunken woman under her shoulders, I supported the feet, and we carried her between us into the house. Elsie and Dr. Erle followed. As soon as she got within Mrs. Hichens recovered consciousness, she struggled to her feet and confronted Father Clinton and me.

"Ah," she said, her eyes opening with a startled expression; "I know you, you're the sham doctor what killed Jimmy Jenkins; you put pisen into 'im, and 'e died."

"Stop talking nonsense," said the Father, "think of your own condition, and learn that silence suits you best at present."

The woman now turned her attention full upon Father Clinton. The anger with which she had regarded me faded from her eyes; it gave place to a sort of terror; her features worked; she fell on her knees, clasped her hands, and spoke hysterically.

"Yes, it's true I've gorn and done it again," she screamed, "and it's your fault, Father Clinton. You promised me faithful that ef I kep away from the Green Dragon *He* would come and help me."

"And do you suppose, miserable woman, that He didn't come?" said the priest in a stern voice; "He

came, but you would not listen to His voice. Did He not speak to you when you were going inside those doors? Tell me the truth."

The woman covered her face with her shaking hands.

"It's true, it's true," she sobbed, "He did speak, and I 'eard Him, but I wouldn't listen."

"You rejected Him. I am bitterly disappointed in you."

"Then I'm safe to go into hell," she cried; "hell's ahead of me." She uttered a piercing shriek, tumbled forward again on the floor, and lay in a state of semi-unconsciousness.

"Come, doctor," said Father Clinton to me, "this is your work as well as mine. I am strong, and can easily take the woman upstairs alone. Please, Dr. Erle, will you stay with the other young lady." He glanced at Elsie. The next instant he had lifted the drunken woman in his arms; she was of considerable weight and very stout, but he managed to carry her lightly and with ease. This was wonderful, for he was by no means a big man. I followed him. As I climbed those filthy stairs, more than one face looked at me, more than one familiar face. On each countenance now was a look hard and forbidding. I had helped these people in their need, I had given bread to their starving children, and had tried to bring them back to life in their hours of illness; but now the only words that met my ears were such as these—"There she goes, there's the quack doctor, her as pisened Jimmy Jenkins, her ain't a real doctor at all."

I trembled as the ominous words sounded in my ears, but determined not to take any notice.

On the top landing Father Clinton paused, he pushed open a door exactly facing the stairs, and entered. In this room were four children. A girl of about twelve was standing at the head of a bed in which three other children, all thin and starved looking, were lying wide awake with terrified faces. There was a second bed at the opposite side of the room, here Father Clinton deposited the drunken woman.

"Now," he said, going straight up to the children, "you need not be frightened, any of you, mother is safe at home at last, she is very bad now, but she will be herself in the morning—remember, too, that she will be desperately sorry for what she has done in the morning. You must all be kind to her then, and try to help her. You need not be frightened. Alice, you had better go to bed."

"But I'm that frightened myself, I don't know what to do," cried little Alice. "Father has been the whole evening, too, at the Green Dragon, and he'll come in any minute as drunk as drunk. There ain't no hope at all," added the child in a weary voice. She fell on her knees by the dirty bed and burst into tears. I went to her and took her hand.

"Come, Alice," I said, "you know me, don't you; you have been to my dispensary for medicine. I am quite certain that your mother will sleep now until the morning, and when the morning comes she will be herself. Now, kiss your little sisters, and get into bed with them."

But Alice had turned and faced me with lack-lustre, terrified eyes.

"You here, lidy?" she said.

"Yes, I am here, why do you look at me like that?"

But my heart sank as I read the aversion in her small, pinched, and yet pretty face.

"It was you as murdered Jimmy Jenkins," she cried; "they all say so, but t'aint true, is it, lidy? Oh, lidy, do tell me, for the love of God, that it ain't true."

"It is not true," I answered; "I did my best to save poor little Jimmy, but God wanted him, Alice, so He took him away. Dr. Erle and I did our best for him, but even doctors cannot keep people alive when God wants them. Don't be silly, little Alice, do you think I'd hurt a hair of any of your heads. There, my poor little girl, don't believe bad of me who am your true friend. Get into bed and try to sleep."

I bent and kissed her, but she still stood irresolute at the head of the bed. Father Clinton meanwhile had gone round to the other side of the bed and was tucking up the children.

"I'll kiss you each if you promise to shut your eyes and go to sleep," he said gravely. He bent forward, and on each small dirty face imprinted a kiss, which must also have been a blessing. The terror left the eyes, and the lips of each little one smiled.

The priest and I were just turning away when a heavy step coming upstairs was distinctly heard, and the next moment a man, tall and cadaverous, entered the room.

"What's this they're all a sayin' about my Jess?" he cried. "Is it true that Jess has gone and got drunk? oh, for shame, Jess; there you be." He stumbled up to the bed, and looked down at the drunken woman, who was in a heavy sleep. "And I've been a praying

for yer that yer should keep sober, and there you goes and does it agen. Oh! I'm fit to cry for yer, Jess, you're a terrible wicked woman, I'm bitter ashamed of yer."

He swayed backwards and forwards, and tumbled down on the foot of the bed.

"It's awful wicked of Jess," he said. "Is that you, Father?" He gave Father Clinton a leering smile, then he shook his head in a knowing manner.

"And I've been a praying for her," he continued; "she knows it; I've been callin' out to the Almighty to save 'er—drunk is it she is? oh, Jess, and I yer 'usband have been praying for yer!"

He burst into maudlin weeping, but, nevertheless, had an eye for the effect of his words, glancing nervously from Father Clinton to me. We neither of us spoke. Little Alice ran up and touched her father on his arm.

"Don't you be a goose," she said.

The terror had all left her face the moment the man appeared.

"If mother's drunk so be you yourself. I looked at you inside the Green Dragon, and I seed you drinking like anything. You had three pennyworth of gin 'ot, and—Go to bed, I'm 'stonished at yer; go straight to bed."

The man shrank away from the child's touch.

"Come, Miss Gifford," said Father Clinton, "we can do nothing more here at present."

We went downstairs. Dr. Erle and Elsie were waiting for us. We went out into the night. Again we traversed the entire length of Nile Street, coming out at the further end. The shops were now all shut. Father

Clinton, without a word, went down some steps; we three followed him, almost recklessly.

"There is a girl in a house at the top of this slum—it boasts of the name of Cherub Court—do you happen to know it?" he asked of the doctor.

"I have never been down here before," replied Dr. Erle.

"Ah, I think I know every house in the court; it is one of the filthiest places in the whole of London; and a girl lives alone in a top room here. It is a queer case; I think it is probable that you and Dr. Gifford may have something to do for it. The girl is paralysed, poor soul. I have seen her several times lately; she cannot move hand or foot. She suffers worst at night. She is in a room by herself, and the neighbours are fairly good to her; but I never saw greater destitution. Come, we will pay her a visit."

"Won't she be asleep now," I asked.

"I doubt it; she seldom sleeps. I visited her a week ago at this hour. She was thankful, for there was a fearful row downstairs; a man was trying to kill his wife. I was just in time; he did not touch her any more."

"You did not call in the police then?" said Erle.

"No; I never do that, I just had a talk with him. If the influence of love won't keep a man back from crime I give him up; but I have never yet found it fail. Come, we will go upstairs and see Lottie Davies. I mean to get her out of this before long."

We went with him. The place was still alive with people lounging about, cursing and swearing; the air was fetid with the most awful smells.

I was now too excited and too much interested to take any notice of Elsie, who, on her part I am sure, absolutely forgot my presence. She felt comparatively safe in the company of the two men.

We entered a house which was pitch dark.

"Follow me," said Father Clinton, "and do not fear anything; but keep near the wall, for there are no banisters to the stairs; there is a hole, too, on the first landing, if you get into it you go down to the next storey. Give me your hand, little white-faced girl, I will lead you up in safety. Dr. Gifford, do not put one foot before the other without feeling carefully where you are going to tread!"

We went on in the pitch darkness. Father Clinton's account of the staircase was not reassuring. The house was still almost empty, most of its inhabitants being out this hot night. At last we reached the top landing. Then Father Clinton knocked at a door. A very feeble voice said, "Come in," and we entered.

This room had a dim light burning; a candle of the poorest order was stuck in a bottle, which stood on a small table near an old-fashioned camp wooden bed. On the bed a girl of about seventeen was lying. She was lying on her back; she had evidently been reading, for a tattered book lay upon the counterpane. She looked up with lack-lustre eyes, then seeing Father Clinton, her whole face brightened.

"I've been singing hymns all day, and I'm a sight better," she said. "I thought maybe you'd come to-night. I prayed to the good God to bring you. I've been asking Him for the last two hours. I've been saying nothing but this over and over, 'Let the Father

come and see me; let the good Father come and see me. GOD have mercy on my soul, and let the good Father come.' I'm very weak, Father Clinton, and I think maybe it's Glory I'll have reached by the mornin'."

"I am glad to see you, Lottie," said the Father, "I have brought these friends with me. I hope they may be able to help you. As to dying, I don't believe your time has come yet. You have work to do in the world, and must not think of death at present. These are two doctors, Dr. Erle and Dr. Gifford."

"I didn't know as lydies could be doctors," said the girl.

I looked at Dr. Erle, he did not take the initiative. I then went forward myself. While I questioned the girl, the doctor, Father Clinton, and Elsie went to the other side of the room. Lottie began to tell me her story. It was both commonplace and miserable. In her young days she had lived in the country, and was fairly well to do. Then her father and mother, with the mistaken idea that the streets of London are paved with gold, came there, utterly failed in the struggle for life, sank down lower and lower, and finally died, both of them one after the other, within a fortnight, in this very room. Lottie had been trained to do slop work, and during her mother's illness the work was sent to her to her home. After the mother's death she still continued to do slop work—a girl in the same court taking her work backwards and forwards to the warehouse as it was finished. She earned by these means just enough to keep body and soul together. The neighbours came to see her once or twice every day, and in their own rough way were not unkind. She had suffered for the last two years from paralysis of

the lower limbs, and was not even able to turn in bed. She told me that the paralysis had come on gradually, and had begun soon after her mother's death. I asked her some questions, and then begged Dr. Erle to help me to look into the case. Finally, we offered Lottie a bed in the hospital. She looked nervous and distressed.

"It's wery ugly in this room, I know," she said, a sob coming into her voice; "but I don't think I'd care to go to no 'orspital. Father went to 'orspital once, but he come out worse nor he went in. I'd rayther stay 'ere and go quick to Glory. Father Clinton has told me all about it; and when I think o' the gates of pearl and the streets of gold, I'm all in a state of twitter to be away. I long to see *Him* coming to welcome me. Father Clinton has told me all about Him, and since I 'eard about Him I don't want to get any better."

"But you ought to want to get better, Lottie, and I firmly believe you will get better, that is why I brought these good friends to see you," said the Father.

She gazed up straight into his eyes.

"Do you say that?" she asked; "do you think that wretched, miserable, sordid earth is better than heaven?"

The poor girl's speech was above her surroundings. In the old days she must have been fairly well educated.

"The thing to consider," said Father Clinton in his grave voice, "is not where we ourselves will be most comfortable, but where the LORD our SAVIOUR wishes us to stay."

She coloured under his words, and lowered her burning eyes.

"You would be very happy in the hospital, that I can

promise you," I said. "I will send round to fetch you to-morrow."

I added a few more words. She kept looking from me to Elsie and from Elsie to me again, but her longest and most eager glances were fixed upon Father Clinton.

"Good-bye," he said, "I want you to get better, and so does GOD Almighty. It was GOD who told me to bring these friends here. Now sleep, you will be in very different quarters to-morrow night."

We went downstairs again as cautiously as we had come up. When we reached the second landing, we heard a feeble quavering voice singing, "I am bound for the land of Canaan." It was Lottie's voice; it kept on repeating the refrain, quavering it out with a passionate and yet joyful insistence.

"A highly neurotic case," said Dr. Erle to the Father.

"You think so?" he replied.

"Undoubtedly. I have my suspicions as to whether the girl is really paralysed at all. She imagines she is, however, which practically amounts to the same thing."

"She is the sort to make a splendid, almost inspired mission woman, if she could be brought to her senses," said Father Clinton. "At present, what with grief and starvation, and the disease which, whether real or not, she believes she possesses, her intellect is in an almost clouded state, and she is scarcely accountable for her actions. The moment I saw you this evening, Dr. Gifford," he said, turning to me, "I thought of Lottie Davis, and hoped that I might induce you to take her into your hospital."

"There is a bed vacant," I answered. "A poor woman

died in the hospital early yesterday morning. The bed is waiting now, and Lottie can have it."

We re-entered the court. The Father in his cowl caused the few people who were still about to treat us with respect, for no one molested us. We were just about to leave the miserable place when a woman put her head out of a window and shouted, "Is that you, Father Clinton?"

"Yes," he replied; "do you want anything, Bessie Frome?"

"It's only Hannah Jones," was the reply, "she's not opened her door for more than twenty-four hours; we believe she must be dead, and little Ruthie as well. Maybe you'd go up and call to her, and maybe she'd answer you—that is, if she's alive. We all think she is dead."

"I'll find out at once; thank you for telling me, Bessie," he replied.

"You seem to know every soul in the court," I said to him, as we turned into a most repulsive-looking house.

"I scarcely do that, but some of the principal characters are old friends—Hannah Jones happened to be one. She was a strong-voiced, fierce virago when I saw her last a week ago. She has a little child, however, to whom she is devoted. The last time I saw her I noticed that the child looked ill, and Hannah was unhappy, morose, and silent. She lives quite at the top of the house. I am sorry to have to bring you up so many flights of stairs."

A small paraffin lamp stood on the third landing, and showed a little light upon the dirty stairs. We mounted, reached the top, and Father Clinton knocked with his

stick against a door. There was no reply of any sort. He knocked again louder. Still no answer. He knocked a third time, and then knelt down and put his lips to the key-hole.

"If you are within, Hannah, please open the door," he said. "It is I, Father Clinton; I have come with some friends to see you, and to find out how little Ruthie is this evening."

After these words there came a shuffling noise inside the room—the sort of noise that a creature would make who went on all fours, then the door was opened a quarter of an inch, the rustling noise was once more heard, followed by an utter stillness—then a croaking voice down deep in some one's throat said, "Come in if you have a mind to."

Father Clinton pushed the door open some inches, but there was something in the way, and he had to squeeze through first in order to remove it. A moment later we three followed him. We found ourselves in an attic which could only be compared to a large box. It is true there was a fireplace at the opposite side to the door; right up against the empty grate a bed was placed. The bed reached almost from the fireplace to the door. This was the obstacle which prevented our entering. Lying on the bed was a woman who raised a scared face as we came in. She had shaggy hair, which hung down over her eyebrows; her eyes were wild like those of a beast, and her hands were like great talons. There was no furniture whatever in the room, with the exception of the miserable bed. When Father Clinton entered, the woman pointed to a little figure that lay close to her in the bed. Father Clinton went up, so did Dr. Erle

and I. One glance told us that we were looking at the face of a dead child.

"It's Ruthie," said the woman; "wee Ruthie. She turned bitter cold early this morning, and I've been abed ever since trying to warm 'er. Sometimes I think she's dead, and sometimes I think no—she's alive. Will somebody look and find out? I stopped in bed all day long, trying to warm her. She shivered so, and shut her eyes, and stopped breathing early this morning, and I've been with her all day. She ain't quite icy cold, but she's very near. Look some one and tell me. Ef she's dead—why, I'll die too; I can't live without Ruthie; she's all I've got."

The woman spoke these words in a rapid voice. Father Clinton whipped open his cassock and produced a small bottle of brandy, and also a bottle of water. He mixed the brandy and water in the cup which belonged to the flask, and held it to the woman's lips. She drank what he offered her with feverish eagerness.

"Ah! I wor near mad with the drought, but now I'm better. Do look at Ruthie; she ain't dead, be she? Give her a drop of brandy, won't you?"

But Dr. Erle had knelt by the child; had felt the pulseless wrist; had listened at the heart, and shook his head.

"The little one is quite dead," he said; "she has been dead for many hours."

"Then I won't drink no more brandy; don't you dare give me any more. Now Ruthie's dead I'll die too. Do you know, you fine folks with all your riches, what killed my Ruthie?"

The woman sat up.

"You who have got too much, listen now while I tell yer what little Ruthie died of," she cried. "She died o' hunger, hunger, *hunger*. Ruthie ain't had nothing to eat for two whole days and two whole nights, and she cried and cried—oh, so bitter, and at last she cried her little life away. And I won't live without her, that I won't. You needn't come here now to gloat over her and me. You git out of this, and leave me alone with my dead Ruthie. Oh, curse you all, you and your riches—curse you all! Little Ruthie's gone. Ef any of you had given me sixpence or a shilling, little Ruthie would ha' lived. Didn't I go a-begging two days back. I had some boot-laces, and I offered 'em to this lydy and that, and they wouldn't have none of 'em, and nobody would give to me. One person said there's the Charity Organisation Society for you to go to; but how could I wait for them to help when little Ruthie were dying. Go now, I don't want yer; you can't do me no good. Curse you all, curse you all! May you all in your turn know what hunger means and want means. Oh, little Ruthie! little Ruthie!"

She fell back on the miserable bed sobbing and crying. Dr. Erle and I bent over her. We tried to remove the dead child from her embrace, but she kicked and fought desperately. Father Clinton produced some meat lozenges from his pocket. "We must try and get her to swallow some of these," he said. "Something must be done for the miserable creature, or she will lose her senses."

"Go away, go away," sobbed the mother, "I don't want anything but to be left alone with little Ruthie I want to die now her's dead."

"I'll stay with the poor woman to-night," I said suddenly.

"Can you?" said the Father in some astonishment; "will you dare?"

"Dare, of course I will dare," I answered; "do you think for a moment I could leave her in this awful state? In the morning we can bring her to the hospital, and try to take the poor little one from her."

"I'll never be parted from little Ruthie, you need none of you think I'm going to allow her to be buried," said the woman. She clasped the child tighter and tighter to her breast.

Dr. Erle laid his hand on my shoulder.

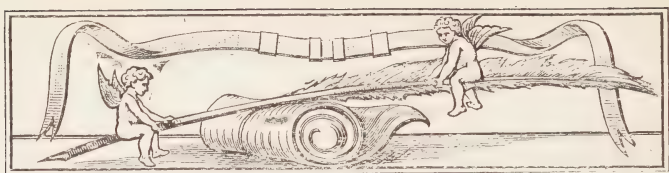
"I will stay and you had better go home," he said, "this is no place for you to be left alone in, and there is Miss—" he glanced at Elsie.

"You and Father Clinton can take Elsie home," I answered. "This is woman's work and I don't mean to give it to anybody else. If some one will come round in the morning I shall be glad, but I will stay with the poor soul to-night."

"I will come for you early in the morning," said Dr. Erle, "and Father Clinton and I will take Miss Tomlinson home now. We must get the poor woman out of this as soon as possible."

"She has got to learn what love can effect, she has had too much to do with death, poor creature," said Father Clinton.

A moment later the two men and Elsie had left the miserable room. I was alone with Hannah Jones and her dead child.



CHAPTER XXVIII

RUTHIE



THE room was filthy beyond description, but there are moments when one cannot think of external things at all. This was one. The woman crouched down on the bed, half covering the child; she did not take the slightest notice of me. There was a candle stuck in a bottle, placed on the floor in one corner. I sat on the edge of the miserable bed and watched that candle. I could not help counting how many hours it was likely to last. I do not think I am a coward, but I did not like the idea of being alone in the dark with that frantic woman and the dead child. Fortunately the weather was summer, and the light of day would arrive early. The woman kept on crooning and talking to the little one.

“You ain’t cold now be you, Ruthie? Nestle up close to mother; that’s right, little ’un, you come close to me. I’ll get you right inside my ’eart—that’s it, Ruthie; now you’re comfy, ain’t yer? Mother’s ’ere; mother won’t leave her own little gal. There, Ruthie, there, kiss me—you want to kiss me. Yes, you was allers such a peart little ’un. Open your purty eyes, Ruthie. Ay, you ain’t

cold now; don't you go a pretendin' to yer mother, you ain't a bit cold, not a bit; and you're full, ain't yer? You *did* like your breakfust, didn't yer—corfee and buns and a red 'erring? You *did* have a nice hearty meal, didn't you, Ruthie; and you're warm and full—warm and full. And look at yer purty dress, a white dress and blue ribbons on it. You're fine, wery fine, ain't yer? Why don't yer larf, little 'un? Ay, I think I 'ears the larf comin'. Larf out, my purty; it does mother good to hear yer, that it do. What! you won't, and you *ain't* got a purty dress on, nor blue ribbons. Oh shyme, shyme! The rich little gals has them, and you ain't a rich little gal, but you're purtier than any of 'em, though you ain't got the smart frocks; it's a shyme, a most cruel shyme! And you're cold, bitter cold, not warm at all; and you ain't had *no* good breakfust; and you're empty, empty as a barrel. No, no, no, Ruthie, don't you go breaking mother's 'eart. You're full, and you're warm, and you're dressed purty; yes, my darlin'; yes, my heart's love."

Mingled with the woman's half incoherent words were sounds in the house—the sounds of drunken people, and people who cursed and swore, and people who fought and quarrelled, coming home, home like beasts to their lairs. They tumbled upstairs. God grant that none of them found their way into this room! I felt that I could bear the poor distraught creature lying beside her dead child, but I could not stand the rest of the inhabitants of the house, more particularly now, as they had learned a false and evil story about me.

It was astonishing how well I was known. I, who scarcely knew anybody in Nile Street, seemed to be

recognised by all the inhabitants. Nevertheless I would not be afraid, and by-and-by my heart began to beat less wildly, for the different doors were shut or banged noisily, and the angry voices died down, and sleep reigned over the evil place.

But I knew I was in the midst of Satan's kingdom, and the anguish and the misery beat against my heart. Would the Kingdom of CHRIST ever come? Would CHRIST as the Master and King ever reign? John Erle, one of the best men I had ever met, was dying, his life was not worth a moment's purchase, any day he might go. Doubtless to a better world; but why should people like John Erle leave their work, and why should the miserable and the outcast live on?

I tried not to think of my own feelings, but I knew that I was living through my darkest hour.

The candle was dying in its socket and the first grey dawn was stealing into the wretched room, coming in, it is true, through only a square of glass in the roof, when the woman turned round and fixed her eyes on me.

"Who be you?" she said.

She raised herself on her elbow and glanced hungrily and fiercely at me.

"What be yer a doin' here?" she repeated. "Who be you?"

"A woman," I answered.

"Ay, I ken tell that, but what be you doin' here? Don't you come atween me and Ruthie; she's in a nice sleep now."

She clutched more fiercely than ever at the child.

"What be yer a doin' here?"

"I thought I would sit with you, Hannah," I said, "for I am very sorry for you."

"But I've nought to do with yer, you're rich and you're full. What have you to do with the poor and the 'ungry?"

I rose then and bent over her. I sat down on the bed close to little Ruth and laid my hand on the woman's shoulder. She struggled, looked for a moment as if she meant to spring at me, then relaxed her hold and gazed without speaking.

"I am your sister," I said then very slowly. "We are both women. I am your sister, Hannah. I am glad that God lets me sit with you in this hour of great darkness."

My words seemed to soften her, she blinked her eyes as if something like moisture was stealing into them, then said in a gentle voice—

"Had you ever a child?"

"I am unmarried," I said, "I have no children."

"I thought as much. Then you can't tell. What do you know about a child, a living child all yer own. You never felt the little arms round yer neck and the little kisses on yer cheek, and the little 'un pulling you and pulling you away from 'ell fire. That is what happened to me as long as I 'ad little Ruthie. I worked for 'er, I never minded how 'ard I worked, and she kep me from 'ell fire. But there, what am I talking of? Did I say I *had* little Ruthie, just as ef I hadn't her now. I have her still, she ain't dead, I don't mind who says she be, I say she ain't. She's as purty as a little gal can be, white dress, blue ribbons, her little face full and 'earty."

"Well now," I exclaimed suddenly, "it's wonderful how you know."

"What do yer mean?"

"Why, that is exactly *how* little Ruthie is looking at the present moment."

"Be you a larfin' at me?"

"No, I am speaking the truth. She is dressed in white, she is not hungry, and she is warm. Her pains have all gone, she is with the other little children who play in the golden streets."

"Oh, don't you come round me with them fairy tales," said the woman, uttering a hollow laugh—then her eyes grew black with misery. She fell forward once more over the body of the child, and began to rock it and kiss it with mad passion.

I thought a little longer and then I said—

"There's light enough now, show me her face."

"Who did you say you was?"

"Your sister, dear. Do you think I could feel unkindly to you when I chose to sit alone with you all through this dark night in this dark room, which is not a nice room, Hannah. It is dirty and ill smelling. I stayed with you, Hannah, because I love you, and because we are really sisters. The same SAVIOUR redeemed us, and heaven waits for us, the heaven to which little Ruthie has gone."

"You mean that heaven waits for you and me, you and me together? Is that what you say?"

"I do say it. It is true."

"You speak wonderful kind, and now I come to look at yer, you has a kind sort of a face. It's nice to think you're a sister to the likes o' me. Lor! you dress plain

but good, and your face it's pale, although it don't look 'ungry, not like little Ruthie's. What was that you were a-saying, say them words again."

"What words?"

"That you was my sister, it's sort of fine to 'ear you it's a sort of a joke, but it comforts me somehow."

"I will say them again—I am your sister."

"Then may I call you sister?"

"Do, Sister Hannah."

"What's your other name?"

"Mary."

"Sister Mary," said the woman, "Sister Mary. Well, you may talk to me. I'm near mad when I thinks of her, but I don't mind how much you speak. It wor good of you to spend the night with me, yes, it wor real good."

"Let me look at the child's little face," I said again.

The woman moved slightly away and revealed the small pinched face of a child of about three years old. Under different circumstances it would have been a pretty face—the outline was delicate, the brows were very dark, and on the cold cheeks rested long and very black lashes, but there was the pinched look of those who suffer sorely from hunger.

"I can guess that little Ruthie must have had beautiful eyes," I said.

"Ay, she *hev* beautiful eyes; it's cunning of you to guess that. How could you tell?"

"By the shape of the lids and the length of the eyelashes; the eyes must have been very large when wide open."

"True you air; and it's real cunning of you to find it out."

The woman became quite interested.

"Ain't 'er 'air thick?" she said.

"Yes," I replied, "very. How old was she?"

"*Is she*, you mean; I wish you wouldn't anger me by taking of her as ef she wasn't. She's three and a 'alf; small for her age, eh?"

"Very small."

"That's because the likes of you never fed her. She'd have been a bonny child if she had been fed. 'Tain't fair that you should have too much and me too little, 'tain't fair I mean for little Ruth."

"She has plenty now," I said.

"Oh don't you talk that gammon to me."

"Listen, Hannah," I said suddenly and boldly, "I mean to help you now, I don't mean to let you go again. You were very nearly lost when my Master and your's sought you out; He sent me to you, and you are not going to be lost any more, and what is more, you are not going to suffer hunger any more, neither you nor little Ruth."

"Ay, ay," she said, "I do feel wonderful peckish. Do you believe that a full meal would bring her back, a full meal put inside her little mouth?"

"No, no, she wouldn't come back even if you beckoned to her. But listen, I have a beautiful thought—we will give her such a nice funeral."

The woman sat bolt upright now, and gazed at me with a smile absolutely dawning in her eyes, then she bent forward and clutched my hand.

"Do you mean it?" she said. "The parish ain't to bury her?"

"No."

I made a sudden resolve as I uttered the word, that Elsie should pay the expenses of little Ruth's funeral.

"She shall have a pretty coffin," I said, "and she shall wear a pretty dress—white with blue ribbons. You would fancy her in white with blue ribbons, wouldn't you?"

"And white stockings," said the woman; "be sure you don't forget the stockings. She never 'ad a pair in her life, and I did so pine for 'em for her. She has neat little legs, purty, you look at 'em."

She pulled up the bedclothes, and showed me the poor little sticks, for they were little more.

"She shall have white stockings too," I said, "and flowers—flowers round her hair, and in her little hands and you can always think of her in her white dress and blue ribbons lying in her pretty coffin, and waiting for the day when she shall rise again."

The woman now had hold of my hands in such a fierce grip, that I could almost have cried from the pain. Suddenly she bent forward, laid her poor tossed rough head on my lap, and burst into a torrent of weeping.

"Oh, you are good, sister, you are good," she said, "and I—I loves you. I believe now as little Ruthie be dead, but, oh, to think of her in her white dress, and blue ribbons, and white stockings, and not being buried by the parish. It's awful cunning of you to talk of giving her a funeral, it comforts me wonderful, that it do."



CHAPTER XXIX

THE POWER OF FAITH



WE took Hannah Jones to the hospital, and nursed her for a day or two, and we gave little Ruth a funeral, the like of which had never been seen before in the neighbourhood of Nile Street. Elsie was very keen about it. She went straight home to see her parents, in order to consult them over the matter, and she came back with a basket absolutely laden with white flowers, and with the softest, prettiest, white muslin frock which could be bought, and sky blue ribbons, and we decked the little one in the clothes, the first time she had ever worn anything fit to be seen, and we put white stockings on her tiny feet, and then covered her with flowers, and the little coffin was made of oak, and Hannah looked proudly on. Hannah's soul was in her eyes; she was immensely proud of the honour done to little Ruth. She forgot the soreness of her tragic death in the joy which this burial gave her. She seemed to think the burial was a guarantee for all Ruth's future happiness. On the day when the child was laid in the grave, she said in a voice of ecstasy—

"Ay, she'll do, she'll do. Ruthie had a splendid funeral—there ain't many have a funeral like that."

We allowed Hannah to ask one or two neighbours from her dreary lodgings to take tea with her in the kitchen of the hospital on the day of little Ruthie's funeral, and afterwards we employed her permanently as a sort of charwoman and help. I never met a more devoted creature. I think she would lay down her life for me.

"You saved her from madness," said Dr. Erle; "that was a grand thought about giving little Ruth a good funeral, it comforted the mother as nothing else could have done. How did it come to you?"

"An inspiration," I replied; "we do have such at supreme moments. I tried to put myself in her place, and suddenly I remembered how much the poor think of funerals, and how they hate being buried by the parish, and so I spoke to her, and you see the result."

"Ay," he answered, looking at me with a smile which was very sad, and which smote upon my heart. "You are a true doctor to the poor."

We were alone when he said it, and now he bent towards me and took my hand in his.

"When I go you will continue my work," he said.

I felt something rise up in my throat which nearly choked me.

"I would do anything in the wide world that you asked me to do," I said suddenly, and then he raised my hand to his lips and kissed it, and gave me a look which told me the truth. If I loved him, he also loved me. I saw it in his eyes. I did not want him to speak nor to tell me about it. All at once I felt happy and comforted. If he left his work in my hands, I had

motive enough to live for, and we would not be parted always.

He went away at once to the other end of the room when he had kissed my hand, and I think he was struggling with himself. But I remained silent, without uttering a word. There was a stillness all around us which felt golden, and I did not want to break it. Some one came in with a hasty message, and I went out. This was the only love-making John and I ever had except just at the—but I will come to that at the right time.

Meanwhile Elsie was doing well. Her nervous fears were forgotten. I do not think any of us during that busy time, when the days used to fly, and the hours to speed by as if on the wings of lightning, had a moment to give to Elsie's fears. Elsie had to go on with the rest of us; we were struggling, struggling hard with vice and sin and misery. We were a very small army in the enemy's country, and it seemed each moment as if the enemy must get the victory; nevertheless, we pressed forward, thinking nothing of ourselves, if only the King whom we served and the Captain whom we followed should win in the evil day.

Lottie Davis occupied poor Mary Dean's bed in A ward. Hers was a peculiar case. She soon got over her dislike to the hospital, and lay in her white bed fairly contented with all the books (she was a voracious reader), and well pleased to be made clean and comfortable. But as to her health, it seemed absolutely to stand still. I could not find, examine her carefully as I would, the least apparent reason for the paralysis of the lower limbs, which were shrunk now from want of use. Dr. Erle was firmly convinced that the paralysis

was caused by a certain neurosis, and that if Lottie chose, she could really move her limbs. She often described to us how gradually this state of things had come on; how nervous she had been, fearing paralysis, knowing what a frightful thing it would be for her if she were unable to walk. She described one night going to bed in a state of abject terror, feeling a queer numbness in her legs; she described her sleep broken and tortured by wild and awful dreams; how she felt as if some one were tying her down in chains; how she feebly struggled in the morning to raise herself from her bed, and found that she had not the strength to do so; how she screamed and fainted. Her father and mother were both dead then, and she was alone. The neighbours came and helped her, and a local doctor, evidently one of the Congleton class, came to see her. He examined the limbs, but could do nothing whatever. She was then moved to a hospital for a few weeks, but returned no better, all the ordinary treatment having signally failed. This was two years ago. From that date to now Lottie had never walked — had never moved the lower part of her body at all. The upper part, the hands and arms, were still in a fairly healthy condition, but the girl often said that she had dreams of similar paralysis coming to the upper part of her body.

“And then, of course, I shall die,” she said.

She seemed to look forward to death as a means of a very glorious release, and I believe, in her way, she was religious. The whole case was puzzling in the extreme. Dr. Erle suggested a very strong current of electricity being applied to the wasted limbs. We used it even to

the extent of pain, but it never produced the slightest result. At last he told me that, in his opinion, there was only one thing to be done.

I asked him what he meant.

"This paralysis is, I am firmly convinced, only due to a neurotic condition," he said. "She imagines that she is paralysed; she has dreaded the disease for so long that she absolutely has brought herself to believe that she has it. There is no reason whatever why she should not move her limbs, why she should not recover her power of walking. We must treat the disease in such a way that she shall imagine herself cured, and then act as if she were cured."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"I saw a similar case treated when I was at University Hospital," he said. "In that case we put the patient under chloroform, telling her beforehand that we were about to perform an operation. We bound up the limbs as if a serious operation had been performed, and when she came to, told her that she was much better, and asked her if she could not move her leg. She instantly moved it. To this day she believes that an operation was performed which cured her, and is quite well. I propose that we act in a similar way towards Lottie Davis."

We talked the matter over a little longer, and at last it was decided that the pretended operation was to be tried. I suggested that we should take Elsie into our confidence.

"She is ever so much better," I said. "She devotes herself day and night to poor Mary Dean's little baby, and the baby shows already the result of good feeding and constant care; but Elsie may read a lesson for

herself in Lottie Davis's condition. I would suggest that she is told."

Dr. Erle quite agreed with me. He was interested in Elsie, and believed that she had a wide mission before her.

"With such an affectionate nature," he said, "with such true sympathy for the poor, and with such unlimited wealth, what can she not effect?"

So that evening I called Elsie, and spoke to her.

"How is the baby?" I asked.

"It is doing nicely, Dr. Gifford. Nurse Marion and I weighed it before supper, and it has put on two pounds already."

"You must not forget, Elsie," I said, "that when it becomes a little better it cannot stay here."

"Oh, why?" she asked. Her face became suddenly piteous, her lips drawn, and her eyes wistful.

"Why?" she repeated again.

"You must understand why yourself, dear. We only possess, including the children's cots, thirteen beds in this little hospital. It is not a home for waifs and strays, remember. It is a home for sick people only until they are cured. It would not be fair to other little babies to keep this one here; you must see that, Elsie."

"But I promised Mary Dean to look after the child."

"You shall look after it; but next week it must go home; there is another little baby who must take its place. I have seen it this morning at the dispensary; it is very ill indeed."

"And will you let me nurse the fresh baby?" said Elsie.

"I have no doubt you can help to nurse it. But now listen; I have something very important to say."

Elsie sat down in some wonder.

"I am very busy," she said; "you won't keep me long? I promised to read aloud to Hester Wilnot; nothing soothes her like my reading. I read the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation. She says she can picture it all. She is dying, but she is very, very happy."

"You have done a good work in the case of Hester Wilnot," I said. "Before you came she was restless and discontented, now she clings to you; but my dear little nurse and sister, for you are both, you will have to extend your work. You must not devote all your energies to one or two. Now I want to speak to you about Lottie Davis."

"But I don't care for Lottie," said Elsie.

"Not care for her, why?"

"I cannot tell you. She seems to me—I don't understand her, I mean—I ought not to say anything, but I don't fancy her. I would rather look after any other of your patients. There is something about Lottie which repels me."

"It is just possible you are too like to be real friends," I said.

"Too like!" cried Elsie, her face colouring high. "You don't mean to say for a moment that I am like Lottie. What do you mean?"

"You are both suffering from a peculiar form of neurosis."

"What is neurosis?" asked Elsie.

"A nervous affection. You can look it up in the medical dictionary, if you really want to know. Of

course in your appearance and in your ways you are totally different, and yet there is a resemblance. Elsie, my child, I have almost cured you, have I not?"

"Oh, dear doctor, what do I not owe to you?" Elsie sprang forward and flung her arms round my neck.

"I know you forbid embraces and much demonstration," she said, "but just for once do let me give you a hearty hug."

I returned it as heartily.

"It makes me happy even to look at you," I said.

"I should have been in a madhouse by now, but for you," said Elsie. "All my nervous fears are leaving me; it is the work, the work, and you and Dr. Erle and Father Clinton, he is so splendid! He asked me to-day to help him with the Girls' Club; he has spoken to Mr. Robson about me, and one of the Sisters at the Settlement had a long talk with me this morning. I shall have more to do than I can possibly get through, and it does make me so happy. When I lie down at night I sleep without rocking. I have no time to think of myself; my thoughts are all full of the poor people here, of the girls whom I shall see at the Club, of the Sisters, and Mr. Robson, and Father Clinton, and Dr. Erle, and you. Oh, I am a happy, happy girl! But there, I am wandering away from our subject. Dr. Gifford, I must be frank. I don't care for Lottie Davis, but of course I will do what I can for her—that is, if you really wish me to. Is it necessary, though, that I should specially attend to her?"

"I want you to break something to her, and I think you will do it better than any one else."

"Of course I will try; but what is it—how grave you look!"

"Dr. Erle and I have been talking over Lottie's case," I continued. "It is a peculiar case; you know she cannot walk?"

"So she says," replied Elsie, with a little pout.

"My dear child, why do you doubt her?"

"Because I cannot see anything wrong with her legs except that they are somewhat shrunken, and yet she is so determined that she will not move them a quarter of an inch."

"She cannot move them," I interrupted; "I firmly believe that she cannot at the present moment, and yet I agree with you, Elsie, I do not think there is absolute disease, at least it is only acute nervous disease. Dr. Erle and I have thought of a plan for giving her back her lost power, and we want you to break this plan to her, at least the part of it which she ought to know. We mean to cure her by the power of faith, Elsie."

"What do you mean, Dr. Gifford?"

"Listen, I will tell you. To-morrow we will take her into the operating theatre, put her under chloroform, and give her to understand that Dr. Erle will operate on both her legs. She will think, of course, that he is going to cut some sinew. Afterwards we will bind up the legs just as if they had been operated upon, and we think that faith will do the rest. Before now surgeons have tried such a method, and have succeeded. It is the faith quality which we wish to awaken in Lottie Davis. When she recovers from the influence of the chloroform she will imagine that what prevented her using her legs has been removed by the supposed operation. Her faith will be strong in us, her doctors

and when we ask her to move her legs, in all probability she will do so. If she does she will be saved."

Elsie's face went from white to red, and from red to white again with the intensity of her emotions.

"Do you think it right to deceive her?" she asked after a moment.

"I do; in a case like hers it is indispensable. It is an experiment which, if she is not told the exact truth, will succeed. And now, will you prepare her, and will you also give her as much help as possible. Tell her that she is to be put under chloroform to-morrow morning in order that an important experiment may be tried. If she speaks of an operation let her think that one is to be performed. You can manage this—will you try?"

"I'll try, of course," said Elsie, "but why am I to do it?"

"Because afterwards you are to be the first to have the great pleasure of seeing her move her legs. Please take the opportunity of saying something to her between now and nightfall."

Elsie looked grave. Presently she hurried away. Late that evening she told me that she had broken the news to Lottie, that Lottie was very much excited and also astonished, that she seemed hopeful, but was in a highly restless, hysterical state.

"She is sure there is to be an operation," said Elsie; "and I believe she is just delighted. Under your advice I did not undeceive her. She asked if she would suffer pain; I assured her that the chloroform would prevent that. She then said that she was quite willing to put herself into the hands of Dr. Erle and Dr. Gifford. She

said too that it was the LORD's will, and that if she died she would go to Him. O Dr. Gifford, I do not like her; I wish I did, but I don't."

"You must not think of your likes or dislikes," I replied. "We have to save Lottie, and we will if you will help us."

"Then of course I will do so."

Elsie smiled. She was a very busy little woman, and felt herself of much importance.



CHAPTER XXX

MARY DEAN'S BABY



THE next day, Lottie Davis was lifted out of her small white bed, and taken into our little operating theatre. She was laid upon the table, and Dr. Erle, Sister Marion, and I were present. Lottie's face was deadly pale, but there was a bright resolved look in her eyes.

"I always knew there must be something," she began, her lips trembling as she spoke; "something wrong with the position of the bones, or some muscle out of place, which prevents my moving my legs. I did not dare to ask for an operation, but I always longed—I mean I always *felt* it was the right thing to do. Although," she added, "I never heard of paralysed people being operated upon."

"It is a new experiment, but I should not wonder if we made a complete success of it," said Dr. Erle in his brisk voice.

"Is there danger?" asked Lottie.

"Not the slightest, I assure you."

An expression of disappointment filled her large light blue eyes.

"What is the matter?" I asked, bending towards her.

"Only this. I have been praying all night long to the good LORD; I have been saying to Him, 'Thy will be done—Father in heaven, Thy will be done.' And I have been trying to picture the operation, and if it failed—I know," she added, "in operations there is always danger, and I want to tell you both now"—her eyes glanced from one of us to the other, "to tell you both that whatever happens I am ready."

"Then that is all right," said Dr. Erle; "and there is not the slightest danger. This operation will not fail. Come, Lottie."

He handed me the inhaler to place over her mouth, preparatory to giving the chloroform. Lottie pushed it aside.

"An artery may burst; something *may* go wrong. In any case I am ready and willing, ready and willing," she repeated. "Ah! it will be joy to wake up in the presence of the LORD!" She looked again from one of us to the other. I began to administer the chloroform. After a very short time it took effect. When she was completely under its influence, Dr. Erle began to bandage both legs exactly as if he had performed a surgical operation. We then waited until she recovered consciousness, and had her gently and carefully moved back to the ward. Elsie was waiting there to receive her. We laid her comfortably in bed. Dr. Erle bent over her as she opened her eyes.

"Lottie, the operation was a grand success. I quite expect you to be walking about in a fortnight from now."

Lottie closed her eyes and murmured dreamily—

"I kept praying to the LORD all the time; He seemed

to be *quite* near, and I felt as if He were holding my hand."

Elsie turned away from her. These two were antagonistic, and yet I believed that Lottie's example would be good for Elsie.

I left the ward.

In the course of the morning Elsie came to me.

"Can you come and see Lottie?" she said; "she is crying most bitterly. I cannot imagine what is the matter with her."

Just at that moment I heard Dr. Erle's step coming up the stairs.

I told him what Elsie had said, and we both entered the ward.

Lottie had been a little sick from the effect of the chloroform, and was now lying panting on her back; she looked at us with intense anxiety.

"Oh, I thought I was dying," she said; "you know I am so fearfully weak from the bleeding. Surely the main artery was opened in each leg?"

"Nothing unusual took place," said Dr. Erle.

"But I feel so awfully weak. Do you think my legs are bleeding now?"

He took her wrist between his finger and thumb.

"There is no hemorrhage," he answered; "you are certainly weak, but not more so than yesterday. Please understand that there is not the slightest danger. You must eat your dinner when it comes."

"I am much too sick to eat."

"You must eat something, don't be silly."

Nurse Marion appeared with a tempting little tray. Lottie fiddled with her food, but presently found that

she could eat something. After the nourishing soup which had been brought to her was swallowed, she felt decidedly better.

"And now, how about the legs?" said Dr. Erle.

"Oh, they are terribly stiff and painful; I suppose it's the part you cut so dreadfully."

"Do you mind letting me see now if the operation is successful? I believe I have quite removed the obstacle. Try for yourself now, try to move your legs."

She turned white to her lips, and the moisture stood on her forehead.

"I don't want to die," she muttered again; "I almost thought I was dying when they brought me back after all that bleeding. Somehow, when death came close I didn't like it a bit."

"Of course you didn't like it," said Dr. Erle; "no healthy minded girl would. You are quite young, you have a long life of usefulness before you. Just think of all the things Father Clinton wants you to do for him when you have recovered; but you can do nothing as long as you are lying on your back. Now move your legs, you can if you choose."

A rush of colour succeeded the pallor of her cheeks.

"Come," said Dr. Erle, "make an effort."

"But they are bandaged so tight."

He bent over her.

"I will slightly loosen the bandage—now."

She painfully lifted first one leg and then the other.

"Ah, I was right," he said, turning to me, "it is a cure." He held out his hand to Lottie.

"I congratulate you," he said; "please remember

now that the paralysis is a thing of the past. You will be all right in a fortnight or three weeks. The thing for you now to do is to move your legs as often as possible every day. Do not trouble about the wound, it will soon be as well as ever."

He left the room briskly.

Elsie glanced after him. I saw a convulsive movement cross her lips for a moment, her eyes shone, then she looked at Lottie.

"What is the matter? How queer you look!" said Lottie.

"I feel a little hysterical," said Elsie. "Forgive me, I'll be back in a few moments."

She ran out of the room, rushed into our sitting-room, knelt down by a chair, and burst into a fit of mingled laughter and tears. I went after her.

"What is the matter, Elsie?" I said.

"Oh, it was so ridiculous—so ridiculous," she panted. "I wonder if it was right to deceive her?"

"Don't get morbid over that point," I said. "In neurotic cases one must use all kinds of devices to overcome the enemy. Be thankful, Elsie, that you have found salvation in constant employment. Lottie's is a totally different case, but we shall have her strong and well yet."

About a week afterwards Mary Dean's little baby was sent home. It was much better, had put on flesh, and was getting well and healthy. Elsie nearly cried when she parted with it.

Albert Dean, the husband, promised to look well after the child. He said that his sister-in-law, Jane Mott, had now come to take charge of the children.

"I am in fairly good work just now, madam," he said to me, "and I can give Jane so much a week. She'll do anything you tell her to do for the baby. I'm real obliged to you, ma'am, and also to the young lady"—here he glanced affectionately at pretty Elsie, who in one of her white dresses looked like a delicate garden rose.

I gave him minute directions. The baby was to have a quart of milk in the twenty-four hours. Milk was to be the principal treatment at present. The milk was to be the best cow's milk to be obtained, and quite fresh.

The man looked his astonishment, but promised to comply with every direction.

"And there is another thing," I said; "we wish you to bring the baby here every week for some time, in order to have it weighed. It is most important that it should not go back in weight, and we must see for ourselves that the strength of the little creature is being kept up. Poor little mite, she would have joined her mother before now, Albert, if Miss Tomlinson had not insisted on bringing her here."

"Ay," he answered, "I believe you speak the truth, and that would have fretted Mary, she was allers so keen on the little 'un. It come just afore her trouble you see, and so, pore thing, she thought a sight on it, and it's a pretty little mite too. It would have been a fine baby now if the wife had lived; but it's a pretty little thing, and we owe it to you, miss."

I gave one or two further directions, and the man, a great burly fellow with a suspicious flush about his face as if the Green Dragon knew too much about him, departed.

The weather was getting intensely hot, and within a few weeks the time would come when, according to our invariable custom, the hospital was to be shut up, and the tired-out workers were to have a month's rest. Elsie implored of me to spend this month with her; but I would not give any definite promise.

"Must I go home?" she asked.

"It depends entirely on yourself," I said. "If you feel strong enough to overcome the enervating influences of your home, it would be a great kindness to your father and mother, and even in making the effort, Elsie, you will have gained an immense control over your nerves."

"How long must I be away from here?" she asked next.

"We open the hospital again and begin our winter's work on the 1st of September."

"Then for the four weeks of August I believe I can do it," she said; "but I will write to father to-day. He said something about taking me to Switzerland; but would that be fair to mother?"

"Urge your father to take your mother as well," I answered. "It would give her the greatest possible pleasure to go with you, and you know you owe them both a duty; you must never forget that."

She ran off to write the necessary letter, and I went into A ward to see poor Hester who was fast dying, and who would not live until the 1st of August.

Lottie Davis was now much better. She could move her legs freely, could walk a little, and stand. She and I talked often about her future life, and I resolved to help her out of my own funds if necessary. Father Clinton's idea about her was that she could be trained

to do splendid work as a mission woman, but I doubted if her nerves were quite strong enough for this as yet, and thought that a whole year in the country would be the best training for mind and body at present. It would not do for Elsie to provide out of her funds for all my poor people, and in Lottie's case I resolved to be her good angel unaided. Elsie and Lottie were really antagonists—there was no use in ever hoping that they would be friends.

The weeks went by. The weather grew more and more sultry, and I think we were all languid. Fresh air became about the most precious thing in our existence. We began to dream about it at night, and we thought about the cool breezes of the sea and the sweet freshness of the country at all hours and seasons. But hot weather in these crowded parts of London does not mean a free time. It brings many troubles in its train which have all to be met by those who would really succour the poor, and Dr. Erle and I were busy all day long. The little hospital was quite full too, and I never seemed to have a moment to myself.

One day towards the middle of July Elsie came to me and said that she had had a very uncomfortable dream about Mary Dean's baby. She reminded me that although it had been taken from the hospital a month ago, it had not yet been brought back to be weighed.

"I want to go and see the baby," said Elsie, "and will you come with me, doctor? Sister Marion could come, and of course there is always George, but I would much rather go with you."

"Very well," I answered, "I happen to have a spare

hour and am really interested in the child. We will go at once, Elsie."

The day was a very close and thundery one, and it was about seven in the evening when Elsie came to me with her request. She skipped off now to our mutual room, and put on her pretty white hat. On every occasion I encouraged her to make herself look as bonny as possible, and hitherto she had never gone anywhere without being politely and kindly received, but the Dean's house was in a bad quarter, and we could not get to it without going down the detestable Nile Street. Even in the daytime it was scarcely safe for two ladies who did not wear Sisters' uniform to be seen in this quarter; but habit makes the most timid of us bold. Elsie and I had got accustomed to the poor and their many vagaries by this time. We were both fairly well known in the Nile, and did not think we had much cause for fear.

Just as we were leaving the house there came a hurried messenger from Dr. Erle's house close by. He brought me a note from Dr. Erle. I tore it open.

"I am not well and want to see you—can you find time to call about nine this evening? I have something important to say."

I scribbled off a hasty reply, and gave it to the boy. Elsie glanced into my face.

"What is the matter?" said the young girl, "are you troubled about anything?"

"Yes, but I cannot speak of it," I replied. "Don't question me. Come, Elsie," I added, trying to smile into her face, "let us talk about something else. Ego has small chance of playing an important part down here."

"Yes; but I must speak to you," continued Elsie, "for I have seen it for some little time; you have a trouble, has it anything to do with Dr. Erle?"

"I will tell you this much, Elsie, it has, but it is a bad plan to meet trouble half-way, and I for one am not going to do so."

"Oh you are so strong, too strong," said Elsie, "I shall never be able to imitate you; but I think I know something of what is the matter. Dr. Erle is ill, I know, I found out a week ago."

"How?" I asked.

"It was the day he and I helped Lottie across the ward, she stumbled and fell heavily against him, and before he could help himself he had uttered a sharp cry. He begged of me afterwards not to mention it. He said he was troubled by pain now and then, but that it did not matter. I know that you know of this pain, Mary, and that—that it troubles you very much."

"It does, it does," I answered; "but please don't say any more, Elsie, I have made up my mind not to break down until—"

Elsie glanced at me and her face turned white. I quickened my steps. Her words brought me torture, and my inclination at that moment was to turn back and to leave Mary Dean's baby to its fate. By so doing, however, I should not be true to the calling which demanded all the best of my life. I walked on so quickly that Elsie had almost to run to keep up with me. We were now about half-way down the Nile, and just outside the Green Dragon. A rough crowd of men and boys had collected here, and as we went by they jostled us a good deal. I resolved if Albert Dean were at home,

to ask him to walk back with us to the hospital, as I did not want to face the Green Dragon alone with Elsie any later in the evening. Just then a boy rushed up, stared me in the face, uttered a kind of whoop, and turned down a side alley shrieking out some one's name as he did so. I did not like the look on this boy's face. The next moment a couple of women came and stood on their doorstep, and favoured me with scowls as they did so. We had only gone a dozen more steps when another woman stuck her face within a few inches of mine.

"You're a nice 'un," she said, accompanying her words with a loud, sneering laugh. "A fine sort of doctor you air, to be sure!"

I resolved to take no notice, and hurried on. We had just reached the end of Nile Street, and I was hoping that our worst troubles were over, when to my unspeakable horror and disgust, a man considerably the worse for drink and crimson in the face, came up and barred the way. It was Dr. Congleton. I had not seen him since the night that Jimmy Jenkins died.

"Now this is what I call real luck," he said; "I have been waiting to have a word with you, miss, for a long time, and I don't mean to let the opportunity pass. You have heard the news, of course."

"I am in a hurry and cannot wait to hear whatever you wish to say now," I replied. "Please let me pass immediately."

Instead of doing so he laid his hand on my arm. A crowd of people collected and surrounded us. Elsie uttered a frightened cry.

"There is nothing to fear," I said, giving her a quick, almost stern glance. "Dr. Congleton knows he cannot

possibly keep me here against my will; but as he has got something to say, I will listen. Now, what is it, doctor? Speak, and be quick."

"It's all very fine for you to order me to speak and be quick," he answered. "If I said all I might say, let me tell you, you would never leave this street alive—you may thank your stars that you are safe and have a whole skin. Do you know what you did that night six weeks ago?"

I made no reply.

"Well, then, I'll tell you. You thought to play a scurvy trick on me, and to get me away from my rightful patients. You posed as a *bona fide* doctor, and made out that I was a quack. Well, then, listen to the result. The poisoning of that poor little boy was bad enough, but you did even greater mischief than that. What do you say to a mother being knocked down by you, and your sly ways? Poor Lizzie Jenkins has gone mad, and is to be taken to an asylum to-morrow morning. That's your doing. A nice sort of doctor you are!"

The people near immediately took up the cry.

"Yes," they screamed, "a nice doctor you air! What made you pisen the boy? You have Lizzie Jenkins's madness now at your door. A nice doctor you air!"

Elsie clutched my arm; her little face had turned white as ashes.

"I thought you ought to know," said Dr. Congleton, "and now that you do know I'll let you go. You're in luck to have a whole skin. Neighbours think of poor Lizzie Jenkins. She was a gentle sort of a body before, but now, good GOD! she's a raging fury. Her husband's

life isn't safe in the house with her. We know what we know, and the least said soonest mended."

He stepped aside, and I went hurriedly on. A few moments later we both found ourselves in the comparative safety of Mary Dean's dwelling.

The Deans occupied the ground floor of a small one-storeyed house. In Mary's time the place had been fresh and wholesome-looking, for she was an excellent, hard-working creature, a devoted mother, and one who made every penny do its utmost work. In Mary's time Albert Dean had never had recourse to the Green Dragon. It was since she had been taken to the hospital that this change for the worse had occurred. After Mary's death, Jane Mott, her sister, had come to take control of the house. But Jane was unlike Mary in every particular. I was dismayed now to see the state of things. The place was absolutely filthy, unwashed, uncared for in any way. The children, who had returned from the Board School, were running about, looking wild, unkempt, uncared for.

Elsie and I stood on the threshold, and I raised the knocker of the door. Jane Mott presently appeared. She was a thin, lanky woman, with a wisp of hair, which hung down now over one side of her forehead. Her face was yellow and drawn. She put up her hand to her head when she saw us, and opened the door very unwillingly. She evidently knew me, although I had never seen her before, and a scowl came between her black brows.

"How do you do, Jane?" I said; "I have come to inquire about the baby."

"Oh, the byby's all right," was the sullen answer.

"I should like to see it," I said. "Albert has forgotten

his promise. He arranged that the baby should be brought to my hospital once a week, in order to have it weighed. How is it he forgot to do so?"

"I can't tell yer; 'tain't my business; the byby's all right."

She moved the door preparatory to shutting it in our faces; but Elsie gave me a nudge of mute entreaty.

"Look here, Jane," I said, in a determined voice, "this young lady and I are much interested in poor Mary's baby. Of course, you, as Mary's sister, are naturally devoted to her children."

"Who says I ain't?" she screamed. "Don't I slave for 'em, and work for 'em morning, noon, and night? The one who says Jane Mott ain't a good sort of an aunt, ain't fit to come inside this 'ere 'ouse. There, *I* ain't afraid of yer; yer can see the byby if you likes. Albert told me what you said about having the byby brought to you; but I didn't bring her, 'cos it worn't no use."

"Why not?" I asked.

"'Cos I couldn't give her the food you ordered; 'tain't likely I could. There now, that's flat."

She opened the door wide, and we entered. We went into the front room, quite a fair-sized, respectable room. In Mary's time it had looked even bright, but now, crowded up with much unnecessary furniture, and absolutely filthy and neglected, close-smelling from its closed windows and unwashed floor, it was as unwholesome an apartment as I had ever entered. The woman strode across the floor, over which bread crumbs, potato peelings, and bones were scattered, and approached a wooden cot at the farther end. She raised the blanket, and lifted the child sullenly into her arms. Alas, poor baby! all

the dawning of comeliness which had begun to visit its poor wizened little face while at the hospital, had departed; it had lost what it had gained in weight, and was a most pinched and wretched-looking little creature. Indeed it was almost a skeleton.

Elsie uttered a sharp and bitter cry. Poor Elsie had learned to love this baby; it was the first creature that had stolen right down into her heart since her own misery had begun. Stretching out her arms, she took it from Jane now, and bent over it; tears filled her brown eyes, and dropped on to the baby's small face.

"O Dr. Gifford," she cried, "why did we let the little baby go?"

"It wor a rare pity you didn't keep it," said the woman; "I'm sure it worrits me past bearing. Albert Dean ain't the man he wor. He spends 'alf his wages in drink, and more than 'alf, and there ain't enough to feed the other three children to say nothing of the byby. You ordered that this byby should drink four pen'orth of cow's milk a day. Where were I to get four pen'orth of cow's milk? We ain't more than eighteen-pence a day to feed us all, and the other children are as hearty as can be; we couldn't give the byby fourpence out of the eighteen-pence, 'tain't likely."

"Well, what do you give it?" I said. "I am not blaming you, remember, but I should like to know exactly how you feed the child."

"And I don't mind tellin' yer." She placed her arms akimbo, and stood facing us.

"I couldn't afford the cow's milk—not likely; and when I saw the byby began to pine, I up and spoke to Albert Dean. I says to 'im, 'You give me fourpence a

day for the byby ! ' and 'e says to me, ' You go to blazes, you.' That's what he says as I'm a living woman, so then what did I do. I bought Swiss milk at fivepence a tin—the best, you know—and I fed the byby on it. But there, I couldn't afford that long, so now I gets the cheapest, twopence 'alfpenny a tin, and I feeds it on that ; but it don't seem to agree with it somehow, and it cries most all its time day and night. The last two days it's been quieter like, and it hasn't took to its milk ; it don't seem to take to nothing ; but it's quieter, and that's a comfort. Whatever happens I ain't to blame."

"I am not blaming you," I said. "Elsie, dear, don't cry ; we will do something for the little baby ; we'll soon have it well. How much of the Swiss milk have you given the child ?" I asked.

"I ain't to blame," she said, throwing her head back, and speaking in a defiant tone ; "I gets two tins a week, they cost me fivepence, and it's as much as its share I will say."

Fivepence a week to feed a little child ! My heart sank low. Were there many other poor babies in this part of great London, being also starved to death on two tins a week of the cheapest Swiss milk ? Very likely.

"Elsie," I said, "we will take the baby back to the hospital at once. It is very ill, and must be treated immediately. You will let us take the baby back, will you not, Jane ?"

Jane said, as far as she was concerned, we were heartily welcome. She wrapped the poor little creature in the cleanest shawl which she could lay her hands on, and soon afterwards we left the house.

In our excitement about the baby we had forgotten all about the dreadful Nile Street and our walk home alone.



CHAPTER XXXI

THE FIRE



THE close day had faded into a still closer evening. There was an unmistakable feel of thunder in the air, and as we walked quickly down Nile Street, Elsie still carrying the baby, a few drops of rain fell. There was a muttering heard in the sky, and then a flash of lightning half blinded us.

"There is going to be a bad storm ; we must hurry," I said to Elsie.

She was constitutionally afraid of thunder, but when I offered to take the baby she refused to give it up.

"No," she said, "I must carry it. It is my baby. Mary Dean gave me a solemn charge about it when she was dying. Oh, what a flash, it half blinded me !"

"We will go up Britannia Street," I said, "and across Howe's Court. Howe's Court is a very rough place, it is true ; but if the storm comes on, most of the people will be indoors." As I spoke I turned to my left, and Elsie followed me, still holding the child. We had gone about half way down Britannia Street when I suddenly remembered that going this way home we should have to pass Lizzie Jenkins's house. I cannot tell now why this

thought gave me a sudden premonition of danger. It was too late, however, to turn back, the storm was gathering thick and fast, the thunder grew louder, and the flashes of lightning were incessant, but as yet the rain only came in large drops at long intervals. I had just turned to Elsie to beg of her to quicken her steps into a run, for it would never do to let the poor little delicate baby get wet to the skin, when I felt a hand clutch me with sudden violence on the arm. To my dying day I shall never forget the feel of that clutch. It was stealthy as well as strong. I turned my head and encountered the much troubled gaze of my old friend, Lizzie Jenkins. The eyes looked straight into mine; a malicious gleam flashed through them for a moment, and then faded.

"I want you, doctor," she said, putting her lips up to my ear; "we're close to my 'ome, and I want yer to come right up with me and see Jimmy's room once again. Yes, it's awful pretty since I tidied it up; and there are his toys about; and I'd like yer well to see it and 'em. You ain't a-feared, be yer?"

"Not in the least, why should I be?" I answered stoutly.

Now I was frightened, but this was a time if ever there was one when fear must be hidden. If for one single instant my terror leapt to my face, I saw that in Mrs. Jenkins's eyes which would fell me to the ground. My thoughts came quickly. I must act with promptitude and had not an instant to lose. Lizzie must be humoured, Elsie saved, and if danger did await me, I must protect myself as best I could.

"Elsie, dear," I said, looking her full in the face, "I

have met my old friend, Mrs. Jenkins—you know her of course. She wants to see me alone for a moment.

"Yes, up in Jimmy's room," interrupted Mrs. Jenkins, putting herself between Elsie and me as she spoke.

"I am coming with you, Lizzie," I said, just glancing at her. "Elsie, go home with the baby, and then let Dr. Erle know why I cannot be with him immediately. If I am not home myself in a short time you will know that I am here, you and Dr. Erle. Now go, dear, you will remember exactly where to find me."

I gave her a warning and determined glance; she hesitated, looked half inclined to remain in spite of my orders, but then seeing that I really meant it, set off running down the street.

"Now, Lizzie," I said, "what can I do for you? There is a very bad storm coming on, and I do not want to be out longer than I can help."

"There's no storm indoors," she said; "you can come straight upstairs with me and see Jimmy's room."

Her voice was very low and restrained. She was evidently keeping a strong curb on her feelings.

"Is your husband in?" I asked.

"No, he ain't, and that's all the better for you; he don't love yer, not he; but I—oh I'm all right;" she laughed a trifle wildly. "I'd like yer well to see the old room, and the bed where the little 'un died, and I want to have a bit of a talk with yer. You'll come up—you ain't a-feared, be yer?"

She thrust her face within an inch of mine, and her eyes flashed a wild and terrible light. Then again her features wore their ordinary mien.

"I will go with you," I said.

"You 'ad better. I 'as no ill-will to yer, but I can't stand being trifled with, not now. Oh, don't that lightning blind one?" She put up her hand to her face.

"Come along, and be quick," she said, pulling my arm; "Rosie's not 'ere, nor the little 'uns, and my 'usband ain't 'ere, and Jimmy, he ain't 'ere neither, Jimmy who wor the light of my eyes. Mrs. Best who lives in the downstairs floor is away too, you and me will 'ave the house to ourselves, all to ourselves; it's fine, ain't it. They said queer things of me, that I wor light in my 'ead, *mad*—yes, that wor it, they said I wor mad; and they had a woman to keep me, and they shut me up in a room, they talked of sending me to an asylum, but I ain't a going, not I. I escaped from Mrs. Tiler's 'ouse over the way an hour back, and I 'as been waiting for you, I 'as been waiting for yer for over a month, but you never come nigh the place. The neighbours said you wor frightened to come, but I didn't think that. Well, 'ere you are now, and I'll talk the matter straight out. It will stop the buzzing in my 'ead may be. You didn't know as there was bees in my 'ead; they're allers buzzing, and they buzzes so loud at times I can't hear my own voice. Yes, that's the truth I tell yer. But I have a notion when I have smoothed matters out with you they won't buzz any longer. Now give me a clutch of your hand. You ain't a-feared? Lor'! what a flash!"

The dirty stairs were lit with a fierce radiance as we ran up together. Presently we reached the room where Jimmy had died. We entered it. It had been tidied up and put in order. I looked round me. There was his little camp bed in the corner, there was the saucepan in

which his last food had been heated, a toy or two lay on the floor, and in the centre of the room on a small table stood a cheap paraffin lamp burning dimly. The moment we entered the room Lizzie went up to the lamp and turned it on full.

"There," she said, "that's better, we won't see the flashes so bad when the lamp burns bright. Lor'! I do wish I 'ad blinds, but there ain't any. You sit so you'll see the flashes, and I'll sit with my back to 'em Lor'! my 'ead does buzz. It began to buzz the night Jimmy wor took, and it has buzzed and buzzed and buzzed worse and worse ever since. I believe there's a swarm of bees inside of me. Yes, I feel queer, very queer. The neighbours say I'm quite gorn in the 'ead, but I don't believe 'em. You wouldn't guess, but the 'usband is afraid of me now, and as to Rosie she'd run a mile from her mother, and the other kids they is all took away too. I owe that to you—yes, to you. Jimmy is the only one who ain't a-feared of his mother. Jimmy's up in a star, you know, and he looks down at me at night and he beckons me. He ain't in heaven, he's in a star, a very, very bright one. He says to me night after night, 'Remember one thing, mother, blood for blood, a life for a life.' That's what Jimmy says to me, I hear it as plain as I hear myself a-talking to you now. Pore Jimmy, he wor the very light of my eyes."

She paused in her eager talk; she had been pacing restlessly up and down, having first taken the precaution to put herself between me and the door.

"You ain't going to run off you know," she said, "'tain't in yer to be frightened; why should yer be frightened?"

"I am not frightened," I answered, telling my lie outright, "why should I be frightened? We were always good friends you and I."

"Stop that rot!" she cried, putting her hands to her ears. Once more the ominous flash filled her eyes, her whole face changed. In the old days it was a comely, pleasant, innocent face to look at. Now it was cunning, there was a look of the wild beast in it.

"I'll just lock the door," she said.

"No, don't do that," I answered; "where is the good? I am not going away, but I would rather you did not lock the door."

"Ah, then you be a-feared?" She came up close to me. "I believe ef the truth were known, you be awful frightened," she continued with a laugh, "and that's"—she paused after her words—"that's"—another pause—"as it should be."

She now locked the door and put the key in her pocket. I wished that I had never gone upstairs with her, that I had allowed the poor insane creature to fight out her cause in the street below. There at least I should have had help. Now I was alone with her.

The rain had begun to fall in torrents, the hailstones rattled on the roof, the thunder roared and the lightning flashed. I could scarcely hear Lizzie's voice.

"'Tain't the storm that frightens me," she said. "Jimmy's above it all in the star, you know; he's smiling down at me all the time, and saying—he wor allers a cute little 'un—' Mother, don't you forget, a life for a life.' Them's Jimmy's words, Bible words too; he wor allers keen on his Bible."

"Well, Lizzie," I said, "I am sorry to see you in this state, but I cannot remain any longer now."

"Why, you wouldn't go out in that storm surely," she said, pointing her finger to the window. "You had best stay quiet, I shan't unlock the door until I 'as had my say out."

She seated herself on a wooden chair, drew it up close to me, and continued—

"Now, Dr. Gifford, let's argufy the thing out. Do you know what the neighbours are a-saying of you?"

"I know very well what the neighbours are saying," I replied, "but they are saying what is untrue—what is wrong. They have been led on by Dr. Congleton, who hates me."

"Ay, and he has good cause to hate yer. He ain't such a bad sort, is Congleton," said the woman, "although I did turn agen him because you made me, with your—" Here she sneered and laughed horribly.

"Well," she continued, breaking off abruptly, "I said I'd keep calm; I can't talk to you proper if the buzzing gets too bad; it allers begins when I worrit myself. I'll have to keep myself in check now, if I never do again. I 'as been waiting for you, and you 'as come. Now let's argufy the thing. The neighbours said this. They said that you *experimented* on my Jimmy; yes, that's the word. They said you put something in him by way of an experiment which pisened his blood. He died, and you and your experiment came to nothing.^m Tain't true, of course; 'tain't likely to be true."

"Of course it is not true, Lizzie," I said; "there's not

a word of truth in it. Ask Dr. Erle, if you do not believe me."

At the mention of John Erle's name a change came over her face. She paused in her rapid talk, and put her hand to her forehead.

"I believe Dr. Erle be good," she said. "He come to see me afterwards, and he tried to reason with me, and ef it hadn't been for the buzzing I'd have listened. He wor a friend to you, and so of course he took your part. Oh yes, fair play is fair play, and he wor your friend, so he took your part. I might have believed him but for Jimmy; but Jimmy, up in his star, kept on saying, 'A life for a life, mother; don't forget a life for a life,' and I—well, I couldn't control myself no longer. Don't you speak of Dr. Erle; he's a good 'un, and you—well, now, I ain't a-saying that you did it; but *s'ppose* you had done it, *s'ppose* you did experiment on my Jimmy."

"Well?" I answered.

"My only boy; the light o' my eyes."

"Yes, Lizzie."

"And with your experimenting you killed 'im; he worn't a bit bad afore you come, and you put pisen into him, and you killed him."

"I don't quite understand what you are talking about," I answered, "but I am listening to you."

"If you had done all this, Dr. Gifford, you ought to be punished, oughtn't you?"

"I ought certainly to be punished," I answered.

She stood up as she spoke.

"I'm a-thinking that too," she continued. She smiled, and then uttered a laugh, the laugh of a maniac. "That's what I'm a-thinking. I wonder," she added,

drawing her chair an inch closer, and laying her hand on the table which held the paraffin lamp, "I wonder now what sort of punishment would be bad enough, and painful enough, for one who had done a thing of that sort. We'll suppose you *'ave* done it, Dr. Gifford; we'll suppose you *did* come into this 'ouse and deceive a poor mother who 'ad only one little lad, and whose 'eart wor bound up in 'im; we'll suppose you *did* put pisen in him, just to experiment, as they calls it. Well, now, in that case you must be punished. What punishment would be bad enough? You shall tell me your own self." She now glared at me, and her eyes flashed. "Say, now, burning—would burning be bad enough?"

"Any one who could do such a horrible thing would deserve almost any punishment," I replied. "But, Lizzie, you are talking of the impossible; you know I did not do it. You know I would have died to save your little Jimmy. I could not save him, and I am truly sorry for you, Lizzie. We'll go home now, Lizzie, to my hospital; I'll take you there, if you like. I'd do all in the world I can to comfort you. Come with me now, the rain is getting less, we can go."

I tried to take her hand, but she pushed me away.

"No, we ain't a-going," she said; "*you* ain't going. Her manner changed, and she put herself between me and the lamp. "You ain't going, for you *'as* done it, and you *'as* yourself said what punishment is fit for yer, and now you shall get it. There, stand out of my way; I'm a going to punish yer once for all."

She rushed forward. I made a sudden dash to get hold of her hand, for the moment had come when I must defend myself with all the strength in my power.

But the mad woman's strength was too mighty for me. She wrenched away her hand, seized the lamp, and held it aloft. I struggled hard to get hold of the lamp, but she struggled still harder to keep it.

"No, you don't," she said. "You 'as said yourself what kind of punishment is fit for you to have, and you shall have it. Here goes!"

She raised the lamp high with an effort, and sent it flying towards me. It fell with a crash on the floor, overturning itself.

There was an immediate explosion, and Lizzie's own flimsy white apron was the first thing to catch fire. I rushed to Jimmy's bed, seized hold of a woollen counterpane, and ran towards her, doing my utmost to fling it round the poor creature in order to extinguish the flames. But she would not let me reach her; she was already past reason. Her one effort now was to set me on fire.

"You have done it," she said, "and it's the one punishment that's fit for yer. You said yourself that burning weren't too bad, and you shall burn—burn to death."

But now the fire touched her, and she began to utter one piercing shriek after another, and at last crouched down in her agony in a corner of the room. She had the key of the door in her pocket. I could not possibly get at the pocket, for the woman was now a raving maniac, nor could I possibly open the door. I went to the window, smashed a pane of glass, and let in some air, but the fire was spreading rapidly. The cloth which had covered the table was already in flames, then the table itself began to burn; the smoke was so blinding that I could not

see Lizzie, but could only hear her shrieks from the other end of the room. The flames leapt in long forks from the floor to the ceiling. The overpowering heat, the blinding smoke, the shrieks of the mad woman, the fire, which came nearer and nearer to me, the agony when it finally touched me, are all horrors which I can scarcely recall now with any vivid distinctness. I had a dim idea that my last hour had come; I uttered a prayer that my sufferings might be brief. The cry of the poor maniac came to my ears. Oh, if I could only save her! Even now if I could get the key from her pocket I might open the door and take us both out of the burning room; but the smallest attempt to go near her would only precipitate the danger for us both.

I crouched up in the corner nearest to the window. The glass cracked from the intense heat. I put out my head and called wildly and loudly to the people below. Just then there came an answering shout in reply to mine. I heard it above the crash of the storm and the din of the flames; it was followed by steps running quickly up the stairs. There came a bang at the door, followed by a terrific crash. The door burst open, and I saw the head and broad shoulders of John Erle above the flames. I saw his face just by the door; there were other people behind him, but I only noticed his face. The smoke rushed out in a thick volume, and seemed to push him back like a hand, but he made his way quickly to my side. He put his arm round my waist, and led me through the smoke towards the door. I was past replying, but I was able to look into his eyes. At that supreme moment I read something in their expression which made all the immediate horror of this fearful

scene fade away, and I knew that I had met something worth living and dying for. He bent his lips to my ear and whispered some words—

Thank God I am in time."

I felt his heart beat strong against mine; the cooler air blew on my forehead. John's face, white as death, was within an inch of mine. The roaring noise made by the fire, now a very furnace, was behind us. I was saved; but John, John himself—why did he breathe so quickly? I struggled to free myself, for I knew I was hurting him; but he held me firmly in his arms.

"To save you I have the strength of twenty men," he whispered.

I made a frantic struggle to reply, but my words sounded dreamlike and far away. The air of the street rushed cool and fresh to my cheeks. Other voices mingled with John's, other eyes looked at me. That one supreme moment of bliss, for which all my life I had been waiting, was over. I fainted.



CHAPTER XXXII

THE KISS



WHEN I came to myself I was lying on my own bed in the hospital. I opened my eyes and encountered those of Elsie—they were red as if she had been weeping bitterly. Those red rims round her eyes puzzled me very much, and I raised myself on my elbow to gaze at her. The moment I did so Elsie rushed to my side, flung herself down by the bed, covered her face, and burst into the most bitter, strangled weeping.

"Come away, Elsie, it is very wrong of you to give way like this," said Sister Marion; now coming forward.

"Oh, I can't help it, it will kill her, it will kill her," moaned Elsie.

Then all of a sudden I remembered the past, and I knew what had happened. The sense of this knowledge was so overpowering that it stunned me. I felt no pain of any sort, only a burning desire.

I stood up, placed my feet on the floor, and gazed hard at the two women.

"I remember all about the fire," I said at last, very slowly. "I know also what has happened. Don't tell me anything, for I know—and don't keep me."

"But you are burned—your hands, both your dear hands," sobbed Elsie.

When she spoke I glanced down at my hands—they were bandaged, and swathed in cotton wool. I looked at them and smiled.

"They don't hurt," I said. Then I staggered to my feet and prepared to walk across the room. Neither Elsie nor Sister Marion said a word. I got as far as the door, then I turned back.

"Don't keep me," I said, looking at them.

I went out. Perhaps they followed—I do not know.

It was long past midnight now, and the street was comparatively quiet. The stars were out overhead, and the storm was over.

"The storm is quite over," I kept repeating to myself, "quite over, quite over." And then I pressed my wounded hands to my breast and wondered that they did not hurt. The night was gloriously fine, the air was fresh and full of peace. There was no pain anywhere—not even in my heart; but I knew, yes, I knew."

By-and-by I reached John's house. The door was open and I went in. The first person to greet me just inside the threshold was Dr. Follett. He did not show the least surprise when he saw me. He came forward, held out his hand to take one of mine, saw the condition of my bandaged hands, and laid one of his on my shoulder.

"Ah! you know," he said, looking straight into my face.

I nodded.

"What could you expect?" he went on, "a man with aneurism—and he carried down the woman after he had saved you. They say the woman cannot live many hours; but you have scarcely been hurt at all—thank GOD for that. Of course they telegraphed for me at once, but I was too late. He did not suffer though, he did not suffer at all."

"Let me see him," I said.

Dr. Follett looked hard into my eyes.

"Ah! Mary Gifford," he answered in a voice which trembled slightly, "you are a true woman after all." Then he took me into John's room.

They had laid John on his own bed, and I saw his smile the moment I entered the room. The old physician paused on the threshold.

"Remember," he said, just before he left us alone together, "that he did not suffer—and for those who love," he continued, bringing out the words very quickly, "there is no parting." Then he shut the door and went away.

I was alone with John. The smile on his lips drew me, and I went up to him, stooped down and kissed him. The fire which had taken him and spared me had at least shown both of us the innermost heart of the other. I knelt by his side and laid my face to his.

"I know everything," I whispered to him, "all that you thought and never said. I know that you love

me as I love you. You have gone first to your God and my God; but I will follow you; and your unfinished work I will continue. Death takes you from me, but it cannot really divide us. Beyond Time and Space we shall meet again—there is no real parting for those who love.”

And then I bent my lips to his and kissed him once more.

THE END.

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